

**EXODUS 34:6-7:  
THE FUNCTION AND MEANING OF THE DECLARATION**

**A THESIS  
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## **ABSTRACT**

The declaration that forms the theme of this thesis comes from Exodus 34:6-7. The purpose of this thesis is to show the centrality and enduring nature of this divine self-revelation to Moses through a literary and lexical analysis of the declaration and its surrounding context. Therefore, chapter one concerns itself with the literary placement of the pericope in Exodus and the literary context of the declaration. Chapter two concerns itself with the lexical study of the Tetragrammaton (יהוה) Yahweh, and the adjectives (רחום, חנון, ארך אפים, חסד, אמת) compassionate, gracious, patient, very loyal and faithful describing Yahweh's devotion. Chapter three concerns itself with the lexical study of three participial phrases describing Yahweh's characteristic activities of guarding covenant loyalty and forgiving sin. Through this investigation we have concluded that the very name Yahweh, his attributes and activities are unique to Israel's deity. On account of his initiative and grace, he alone forgives sin. Yahweh's merciful response to Israel after the golden calf incident is paradigmatic of his behavior throughout Israel's history. The character of the divine presence as revealed to Moses may have initially been a "private theophany" but the character of the divine presence soon became public and as such it reverberated throughout Israel's history.

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## *Abbreviations*

<i>Akk.</i>	<i>Akkadian</i>
<i>ANE</i>	<i>Ancient Near East</i>
<i>ANET</i>	<i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament. Ed. J.B. Pritchard.</i>
<i>ABD</i>	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary. Ed. D.N. Freedman</i>
<i>BDB</i>	<i>The New Brown, Driver, Briggs, Gesenius Hebrew and English Lexicon</i>
<i>BHS</i>	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
<i>BZ</i>	<i>Biblische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>GKC</i>	<i>Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>HTR</i>	<i>Harvard Theological Review</i>
<i>ICC</i>	<i>International Critical Commentary</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>LXX</i>	<i>Septuagint</i>
<i>MT</i>	<i>Masoretic Text</i>
<i>NAC</i>	<i>New American Commentary</i>
<i>NCBC</i>	<i>New Century Bible Commentary</i>
<i>NIBC</i>	<i>New International Biblical Commentary</i>

NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	New International Version of the Bible
<i>NPNF</i>	<i>Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers</i>
NRSV	New Revised Standard Version of the Bible
<i>NRT</i>	<i>Nouvelle Revue Théologique</i>
OT	Old Testament
OTG	Old Testament Guides
OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>PSBA</i>	<i>Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentary
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
WO	B. Waltke, M.O'Connor, <i>An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax</i> , (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1991)
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
ZA	<i>Zeitschrift für Assyriologie</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die Alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>

## INTRODUCTION

Micah 7:18 states, "Who is a God like you, pardoning iniquity and passing over transgression for the remnant of his inheritance? He does not retain his anger forever because he delights in steadfast love." Micah's name means, "Who is like Yahweh," (YA is an abbreviated form of YHWH). And by his name captures an essential question posed in the Old Testament: Who is like Yahweh? Among other characteristics, Yahweh's incomparable forgiveness is extolled in this verse. This question, of course, anticipates the negative response: None! There is no god who can forgive except Yahweh.

The declaration that forms the theme of this thesis comes from Exodus 34:6-7, "Yahweh, Yahweh! A God compassionate and gracious, patient, firmly loyal and faithful, guarding covenant-loyalty to thousands of generations; forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin, but he will certainly not declare the guilty innocent; imposing the guilt of the fathers upon the children and on the grandchildren; and on the third and fourth generations."

On the heels of the golden calf crisis (Ex 32) Yahweh portrays himself in no uncertain terms. He is unique, because he alone can forgive. This uniqueness of Yahweh is reflected in the thinking of many biblical writers in the Old Testament. Its frequent use throughout the Bible is, as Child's suggests, "an eloquent testimony to the centrality of this understanding

of God's person."<sup>1</sup> And, as such, it "constitutes a kind of 'canon' of the kind of God Israel's God is."<sup>2</sup>

Yet even though the declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 is lauded as central in its theological importance, few detailed analyses are available. Typically, general and short summaries seem to suffice among commentators.<sup>3</sup> W. H. Gispen concludes that "each word in this mighty "proclamation" of the Lord is of paramount importance"<sup>4</sup> but then proceeds to explain only briefly each attribute. He does not develop their "paramount importance" in the narrative nor in the material that follows. Given the weightiness of both the Tetragrammaton (YHWH) and the term (hesed) חֶסֶד in the Bible, as well as the other terms of the declaration, one is struck by the lack of substantial lexical studies by the commentators.<sup>5</sup> What

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<sup>1</sup> B. Childs, *The Book of Exodus: A Critical, Theological Commentary* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1974).

<sup>2</sup> T. Fretheim, *Exodus: Interpretation* (Louisville: John Knox, 1991).

<sup>3</sup> It should be noted that N. M. Sarna's commentary, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken Books, 1986) has more to offer than most commentaries on Exodus relative to ancient near eastern parallels. But his coverage of the issues concerning חֶסֶד and חֶסֶד remains limited. (*JPS Torah Commentary, Exodus* [Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991]).

<sup>4</sup> W. H. Gispen, *Exodus: Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982).

<sup>5</sup> See J. P. Hyatt, *New Century Bible Commentary on Exodus* (London: Marshall, Morgan and Scott Ltd., 1971). W. C. Kaiser, *Expositor's Bible Commentary, Vol 2 Genesis-Numbers* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990). We are cognizant of the various journals and monographs covering these two key terms. However, the commentators do not satisfactorily reflect this research. As a result, they seem to lack adequate interpretation of these verses in their commentaries.

emerges as useful for a majority of commentators is to mention the frequent repetition of some of these words across the canon. However, rarely does a discussion revolve around the literature they appear in, their pertinent contexts, or their interpretation in light of Exodus 34.<sup>1</sup> It is unfortunate that too little attention has been paid to this declaration that apparently became part and parcel of Israel's conception of Yahweh.

The first chapter of this thesis will include a literary analysis of the placement, context and function of the declaration in Exodus.<sup>2</sup> We will attempt to illumine the nature of Israel's need that culminated in this declaration.

Chapters two and three will build upon and develop the lexical data of Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>2</sup> Attention will not only be given to the Tetragrammaton and  $\text{יהוה}$ , but to each term and its interpretation in our passage. In this manner, we aim to avoid the subjective singling out of the, "most important" words when, in fact, all the vocabulary may be equally important. In this way we hope to reflect the supreme nature of the entire declaration. We will suggest that, due to the declaration's content and enduring nature, the pericope can be understood as a linch-pin in the theological progression of the Old

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<sup>1</sup> We realize that to discuss the parallels adequately would amount to a separate thesis for each parallel.

<sup>2</sup> Numerous articles and monographs have more than aptly covered  $\text{יהוה}$ . We will discuss the latest scholarly opinions below. We will do the same for the Tetragrammaton.



Testament. This initial response from Yahweh to Israel in the Exodus 34:6-7 declaration appears to function as a paradigm in the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> This study assumes a synchronic reading of Exodus 32-34 with a focus on its final narrative form and theological themes. Issues of sources, redactors and authorship, as important as they are, fall outside the scope of our study.

## CHAPTER ONE

### A Literary Analysis of the Declaration in Exodus 34:6-7

#### 1.1 The Literary Placement of the Pericope in Exodus

##### 1.1.1 The Structure of Exodus

I. THE BONDAGE IN **EGYPT** - 1:1 - 12:36

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II. THE EXODUS TO **WILDERNESS** - 12:37 - 18:27

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III. THE COVENANT AT **SINAI** - 19:1- 40:38

The Law 19-24

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The Tabernacle 25-31

Ritual

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*REBELLION* 32-34

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The Tabernacle 35-40

Raising

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The outline above reflects the fact that Exodus displays a geographical structure with the events at Sinai providing the focal point. More than half of the book is devoted to this geographical location (19-40). From this emphasis we may be able to discern what was literarily important to the author. In the geographical structure the author also preserves a chronological progression of the book's events.

Chapters 1:1-12:37 take place in Egypt, emphasizing Israel's bondage (1:1-2:22), Moses' call (2:23-4:31), the ten plagues and the Passover (7:8- 12:36). Chapters 12:37-18:27 record Israel's subsequent exodus into the wilderness (12:37-13:22), the parting of the Red Sea (14:1-15:21) and God's miraculous provisions (15:37-18:27). Chapters 19-40 comprise the second main division of the book where the events take place at Sinai emphasizing covenant (19-24) and tabernacle (25-40). The unique revelation to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 thus takes place in Sinai, and is properly at home in this second main division of the book.

The Sinai division consists of four main sections involving three topics: one pertaining to law/covenant, (19-24); one pertaining to the ritual of the **tabernacle**, (25-31) one recounting Israel's **rebellion** with the golden calf (32-34) including the declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 and subsequent covenant renewal concluding the rebellion story. The remaining section in this Sinai division returns to a discussion concerning the raising of the **tabernacle** structure (35-40).

The author devotes six chapters to the topic of law, 13 chapters to the topic of tabernacle, and three chapters to the topic of rebellion. Of importance is the literary emphasis the author gives to the tabernacle in terms of the amount of space used to address this topic.

In the Sinai division one can, perhaps, more readily understand the topical juxtaposition of law with tabernacle but this is not the case with the juxtaposition of tabernacle and rebellion. For sandwiched in between the important tabernacle material we read of the golden calf incident and the succeeding developments providing the immediate narrative context for Exodus 34:6-7. What possible connection does the calf story have with the tabernacle story, if any at all? How does one make sense of this apparent but, no doubt, deliberate intrusion within the tabernacle material?

N. M. Sarna offers a solution that we find to be a viable option.<sup>1</sup> He states that a deliberate structuring took place, one that is evident from the wording of 31:18. The statement that God "gave Moses the two tables of the testimony, tables of stone, written with the finger of God," connects and transitions the reader to the golden calf incident which eventually provokes Moses to smash<sup>2</sup> the tablets after such

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<sup>1</sup> N. M. Sarna, *Exploring Exodus* (New York: Schocken) 1987, 215-220

<sup>2</sup> We should note that this act on Moses' part was not only an emotional response to the happenings at the foot of the mountain. According to Akkadian legal terminology, "tuppam hepum" translated as "to break the tablet" meant to invalidate a document or agreement (CH #37 in *ANET*, 167; *CAD*, 6, H, pp.170-172.) Therefore, Moses' action contained legal symbolism that can be understood as the annulment of the covenant. The

apostasy. Sarna explains how this apparently abrupt intrusion provides a commentary on the text. The "distinctive idea of the religion of Israel was thereby violated and nullified. Instead of the unique revolutionary idea of the Divine Word enshrined in the Holy of Holies as the token of the immediacy of the divine presence, there was a profane, plastic image which could easily be recognized as falling within the orbit of paganism."<sup>3</sup> The situation thus produced two opposing responses: an illegitimate and distortive response with the golden calf; and the other legitimate and corrective with the tabernacle. This may explain the placement of the golden calf story within the tabernacle material.

As mentioned above in the structural analysis, our pericope brings the golden calf story to completion. We have seen how the calf story is built into the important tabernacle section. But what events led up to this particular placement of the declaration?

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historical recapitulation of the golden calf incident in Deuteronomy 9:6 - 10:5 seems to show a deliberate response on Moses part; more than an emotional response.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

## **1.2 The Literary Context of the Declaration**

### *1.2.1 An Outline of Exodus 33:1-34:4*

- I. The Nature of Israel's Problem: 33:1-6
- II. The Nature of the Tent of Meeting: 33:7-11
- III. The Nature of Moses' First Plea/Yahweh's Response: 33:12-17
- IV. The Nature of Moses' Second Plea: 33:18
- V. The Nature of Yahweh's Response: 33:19-23
- VI. The Nature of the Preparation for Declaration: 34:1-4

### *1.2.2 The Events of Exodus 33:1-34:4*

#### **I. The Nature of Israel's Problem - 33:1-6**

The consequences of the golden calf incident are keenly felt in the narrative preceding the Exodus 34:6-7 declaration. By taking matters into their own hands and attempting to secure divine guidance by building a calf,<sup>4</sup> Israel breaks covenant

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<sup>4</sup> In the ancient world, it was quite common to depict a god in the form of a bull. The animal symbolized lordship, strength, energy, and fertility and "was either deified and made an object of worship or, on account of these sovereign attributes, was employed in representation of deity" (Sarna 218). Sarna opts for the latter; the calf may not have been built to represent the deity. Drawing upon ancient near eastern art he asserts that, instead, it was meant to function as the pedestal that elevated the invisible God of Israel above human level and the calf suggestive of his attributes (218). The danger with such an artistic

for the first time.<sup>5</sup> This "fall of Israel" as it is sometimes called, sets into motion a series of both expected and unexpected events.

As one might expect Yahweh responds with covenantal judgement and threats.<sup>6</sup> We learn of Yahweh's desire to consume the people and make of Moses a new, great nation (32:10). Yahweh also desires to "blot" Israel "out of his book (32:33).<sup>7</sup> Moses' intercession stayed God's hand and the text shows that on account of the calf they made, "Yahweh sent a plague upon the people (32:35). None of what Yahweh threatened came to pass. Instead, a plague seemed to suffice as covenantal judgement.

As the narrative continues we learn of an unexpected event. Upon giving the command to depart for the promised land, Yahweh announces further recourse he must take relative to their rebellion. He announces a *necessary* adjustment regarding the travel arrangements (33:1-3). He threatens, by his absence, to terminate his ongoing relationship with the people. This is a fitting conclusion to their rejection of

convention, however, was that it could eventually divert human attention to itself and away from the invisible one it was meant to evoke (218). But this is problematic since Aaron identifies the calf itself as אֱלֹהִים. Rather than draw upon iconography, we should draw upon ANE literature which often identifies gods as bulls. El is a bull, Ninlil is a wild cow and even pharaoh is a "mighty bull, shining from Thebes." Thus the calf is more accurately interpreted as a god/gods not a pedestal.

<sup>5</sup> Ex. 32:1-6

<sup>6</sup> Breaking the oath typically brought the full force of the imprecation on the guilty party (M.G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King*)

<sup>7</sup>All translations are the author's unless otherwise stated.

Yahweh. Yahweh, whose very name appears to ensure HIS presence,<sup>8</sup> decides to withdraw his presence from Israel and leave them in the presence of an angel<sup>9</sup> to guide them into the land.<sup>10</sup> Because of their sin the people forfeited the privilege of Yahweh's presence. Israel's problem appears to be grave.

Upon hearing this news, the people "mourn" (אבל) as one does over the dead.<sup>11</sup> The concept of Yahweh's angel going before them was promised and declared by God prior to this occasion (23:20-23). A change in leadership should be nothing to mourn over; after all, Yahweh still promises to give Israel the land (33:1-3). And for this reason, they should be thankful not mournful. However, unlike the prior מלאך יהוה (angel of Yahweh) who was intended to represent both Yahweh's presence and guidance, (שמי בקרבו [my name is in him]),<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> See the discussion below regarding the Tetragrammaton and how it signifies an active presence (Ex.3:14).

<sup>9</sup> The term מלאך can be translated as "messenger" or "angel of Yahweh." Angels or messengers appear to have had varied functions in the Biblical text. See Gen. 16:11-12; Ex. 3:2; Judg. 13:3-5; 2 Kings 1:3, 15, etc.

<sup>10</sup> Ex. 33:2, 4, 12.

<sup>11</sup> Ex. 33:4. In the Hithpael the verb means to observe mourning rites (2 Sam. 16:1; Gen. 37:34; 2 Sam. 13:37, 14:2, 19:2). At the news of Yahweh's judgment, the people responded, as indicated by their dress, as ones observing mourning rites.

<sup>12</sup> The angel of Ex. 23:20-23 was intended to represent Yahweh himself. J. J. Niehaus argues that the angel of Yahweh in Ex. 13:21-22; 14:19,24 is to be understood as a theophanic presence of God and is one and the same with the angel of Ex. 23:20-23 on the basis of similar language portraying the two. Yahweh and his angel/messenger may be the same based on the meaning of the term מלאך itself; the alteration of third and



this מלאך seems to represent only Yahweh's guidance void of his actual presence, as indicated by Yahweh's clear refusal to accompany Israel. The people's response, perhaps, reflects what is at stake. The issue is much more than a simple leadership changeover. The decision to withdraw seems to have direct bearing on their covenant status.<sup>13</sup> For without Him there will be "no special treasure, no kingdom of priests, no holy nation, no Yahweh being their God, no covenant, no ark, no tabernacle, no altar, no cloud of glory."<sup>14</sup> A grid-lock

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first person; the unique role of the angel regarding sin; and on the fact that Yahweh's name is in the angel. For details of his argument see *God at Sinai* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995) 191-194.

Kline argues that the denial of his presence is more particularly a denial of his theophanic presence. This theophanic presence represented by a cloud was new to Israel's experience. Thus the threat to withdraw may be understood as a threat to a return to an older theophanic means of revelation as in Genesis where the theophanic presence was experienced on a private and personal scale (M. G. Kline, *Images of the Spirit* [South Hamilton, 1986] 73). In our opinion, the text does not qualify Yahweh's absence in the manner that Kline's argument suggests. The context gives no indication that Yahweh intends to revert to the "old way of doing things." He states simply and emphatically that he will not be present in their midst.

<sup>13</sup> The presence of God in Israel's midst appears to be an integral part of its covenantal relationship with Yahweh. When Yahweh initially called Moses, he promised "I will be with your mouth" (Ex. 3:12; 4:12; 15). In Exodus 6:2-8, Yahweh associates his name (active, present God) four times with covenant (6:2, 2b, 6, 7 ). The presence of God is, therefore, realized in the covenant. Yahweh then proceeds to proclaim himself as a redeeming God in (20:5). After Israel's deliverance from the Egyptians, Yahweh made the covenant, because "I brought you to myself" (Ex. 19:4). Moses himself assumes the connection (Ex. 33:16; see also Lev. 26:11-12). Therefore, we could infer that the withdrawal of God's presence amounts to a broken covenant (Ezekiel 10 and Hosea 1-2).

<sup>14</sup> Durham, *Exodus* 437.

situation exists in the relationship now. For if Yahweh accompanies the people, he will have to consume them because of his holy presence. But if he does not go they will be consumed by the enemies of the land. The decision to withdraw is in keeping with the progression of events beginning at Ex. 32:10. Yahweh's initial response to the calf crisis stated that he was going to consume them. After Moses' prayer, however, Yahweh revoked the threat of consuming them (32:14). Thus Yahweh declared they could still exist as a people. But now in Ex. 33:1-5, he declares that his presence with them means their destruction. He is, therefore, compelled to withdraw in order to keep his promise to Moses. Thus the grid lock situation. The punishment seems decisive. And indeed, Israel's need is crucial at this point. Israel needs to be reconciled in her covenant relationship to Yahweh.

This need sets the stage for the ensuing events in the chapter. Yet verse 5 gives Israel a glimmer of hope with this statement, חָרַד עֲדִיךָ מֵעֲלֶיךָ וְאָדַעָה מִה אֲעֲשֶׂה לָּךְ (*take off your ornaments so that I may know what I will do concerning you*). It seems her covenant status before the covenant suzerain is still open for review after all. What appears as dreadfully decisive may not be so when all is said and done.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ex. 33:7-11 (**II. The Nature of the Tent of Meeting**) This paragraph presents several problems and so as not to interrupt the flow we treat it here only briefly. In fact, it would not alter our discussion to leave it aside all together and pick up the discussion beginning at verse 12. One option, then, is to treat it parenthetically. Having said this, we realize that it is still a part of the chapter and serves an immediate purpose. One can see several topical functions for

Both the threat of his absence and the open endedness of Yahweh's decision *וְאֵדַע מָה אֶעֱשֶׂה לָּךְ* (...that I may know what I shall do concerning you) appropriately drive Moses to Yahweh for the third time in the Exodus 32-34 narrative.<sup>16</sup> We have witnessed the people's response to Yahweh's declared absence, but have not witnessed Moses' response to Yahweh's declared absence until now in verses 12-17.

### **III. The Nature of Moses' Plea/Yahweh's response 33:12-17**

In 33:12-17 Moses responds, as might be expected, in a manner similar to past circumstances (3:11-15; 4:10; 6:12). Upon receiving his marching orders, Moses enters into a time of questioning Yahweh. For Moses, this line of questioning is probably justified given Israel's present unstable covenant

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it in the chapter. The verses show the close relationship Moses and Yahweh shared. They seem to validate Moses' continued role as covenant mediator. Perhaps T. Fretheim is correct about this topical function when he concludes, "The God-Moses relationship is presented as one that holds some promise for working through this critical time in Israel's history (*Interpretation* 296)." Note also how the verb tenses (perfect consecutive in immediate dependence on the preceding imperfect verbs) tell the reader how Moses used to do things *customarily* (c.f. GKC, #112e, 331). This may imply a dischronologized section (M. G. Kline, *Images*, 74). R. W. Moberly considers the tent to be a temporary mediation of Yahweh's presence prior to the full restoration of the divine presence Moses subsequently intercedes for. He takes this unit chronologically and sees it as access to God's presence in spite of the recent judgment pronounced (*At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus 32-34* [Sheffield:JSOT Press, 1983] 63-64).

<sup>16</sup> See Ex. 32:11, 31 for the other two occurrences.

status and given Yahweh's recent declaration. Since the command to depart has such a different ring to it now, the covenant mediator needs to know how Yahweh intends to deal with them in this new situation. What is the precise nature of Moses' plea?

This is perhaps one of the most important pleas of Moses' career. The basis (וְכֵן)<sup>17</sup> for his particular line of questioning is twofold: Yahweh knows Moses by name; Moses has found favor with God (33:12-13). Likewise, the grounds (כִּי)<sup>18</sup> for granting the plea are identical (33:17). This phrase serves as an *inclusio* to the paragraph and its meaning helps us to unravel what Moses is asking of Yahweh in this conversation. While the verb "to know" is common in the Old Testament and can have several meanings,<sup>19</sup> the full phrase יָדַעְתִּיךָ בִּשְׁמִי ("I know you by name") implies that Yahweh intimately knows Moses' reputation and character.<sup>20</sup> The other element that forms the basis of the plea is the phrase, מֵצָאתִי חֵן בְּעֵינֶיךָ ("you have found favor in my sight"). While the phrase is common,<sup>21</sup> only in

<sup>17</sup>The particle וְכֵן is used (with the perfect aspect of מֵצָא) in the sense of a real condition in this clause. Gen. 18:3 offers another example similar to this verse.

<sup>18</sup>We take the conjunction כִּי as a causal relation in this case. For a similar use of the conjunction see Ex.33:3 where Yahweh threatens to withdraw his presence *because* Israel is קָשָׁה עֲרֵף (stiff-necked).

<sup>19</sup>יָדַע is used six times in this paragraph so an understanding of its use must be ascertained. The possible meanings are: 1. "to observe," 2. "to find out," 3. "to have sexual intercourse," 4. "to understand," (cf. BDB). In this context, and with its association with וְכֵן, it probably means knowing in the sense of in an intimate relationship.

<sup>20</sup>The phrase also carries connotations of election. See Hosea 13:5; Amos 3:2 ; Isa. 43:1; 45:3; 49:1; Jer. 1:5.

this instance and in Genesis 6:8 do individuals find favor with God. A comparison can be drawn between Moses and Noah. Noah's righteous reputation is dramatically contrasted with the earth's corrupt and evil reputation (Gen.6:9-11). On the grounds of Noah's righteousness God preserved Noah and his family (Gen.7:1;8:1).<sup>22</sup> Likewise, Moses' "righteous reputation" is dramatically contrasted with Israel's stiff-necked reputation.<sup>23</sup> On the grounds of Moses' righteousness God preserves Moses and the nation of Israel.<sup>24</sup> Thus the phrase *"I know you by name and you have found favor in my sight"* can be understood to describe 1. Moses' vital role as elected covenant mediator for Israel and 2. his righteous reputation or character before Yahweh. The lexical contrast between Noah's non-mediatory action in Genesis and Moses' action as mediator in Exodus 32-34 makes Moses unique in his intimate relationship to Yahweh.

In light of this understanding of "favor" so key to the

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<sup>21</sup> As an expression of deference see: Gen. 18:3; 30:27; 50:4; Numb. 32:5; 1 Sam. 27:5; 2 Sam. 16:4; Esther 5:8; 7:3, 8:5. As a mode for strengthening a request see 2 Sam. 20:29; Numb. 11:15. As enjoying someone's approval see 1 Sam. 16:22; 20:3, 2 Sam. 14:22, Ruth 2:10,13. As a goodwill deed bestowed on someone see Gen. 19:19; Judg. 6:17; Ex. 33:13.

<sup>22</sup>The use of 'נ in Gen.7:1 provides the grounds for God's preservation of Noah and his household. This is identical with Ex. 33:12-17.

<sup>23</sup> Compare the people's condition as announced in Ex. 33:1-6 with the description of Moses' close relationship to God in 33:7-11. The contrast is also noticeable in 32:10; 32:31.

<sup>24</sup> The whole discussion in this paragraph revolves around the favor Moses had with God. The phrase is repeated five times in the dialogue.

passage, we can understand Moses' central concern to be found in verse 13, הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרֹכְךָ (cause me to know your ways) and not in verse 12, הוֹדַעְתָּנִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר תִּשְׁלַח עִמִּי (You have not caused me to know who you will send with me). The concern in verse 12 regarding an accompanying presence must not be allowed to become a "red herring." This is further seen in Moses' continued line of questioning even after God consents to reinstate his presence.<sup>25</sup> It seems that what Moses really desires is to know Yahweh in the manner that Yahweh knows Moses. Since Yahweh knows Moses, Moses appeals to Yahweh, הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרֹכְךָ (cause me to know your ways). In other words, Moses wants to know Yahweh's character as intimately as Yahweh knows Moses' character. Our assertion is based on four factors:

1. The meaning of the term דֶּרֶךְ. In the plural דֶּרֶךְ can refer to an individual's behaviour or character.<sup>26</sup>
2. Further indication that Moses is requesting a revelation of God's character comes by comparing the structure of verse 13 with verse 12.

ידעתִיךָ בִּשְׁם וְגַם מִצֵּאת חַן בְּעֵינַי 12b

הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרֹכְךָ 13a

וְאִדַּעְךָ [בִּשְׁם] לְמַעַן אֲמַצָּא חַן בְּעֵינַיךָ 13b

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<sup>25</sup> If Moses' concern was only in securing guidance for the commanded journey, how does one explain the subsequent conversation? As the story unfolds, it seems apparent that Moses is ultimately seeking God's forgiveness. This can only be realized by a revelation of God's nature. The subsequent declaration provides this for Moses.

<sup>26</sup> Deut. 32:4; Isa. 55:8; 58:18 Psalm 103:7; Job 4:6; 2 Kings 22:2; Prov. 21:2, 16:7.

3. The third factor supporting the above assertion is verse 17 and God's response to Moses' plea. After granting to Moses the assurance that *הַדָּבָר הַזֶּה אֲשֶׁר דִּבַּרְתָּ אֲעָשֶׂה* (*this matter which you have spoken, I will do*) Yahweh announces how he intends to carry out Moses' request, *וְקִרְאתִי בְשֵׁם יְהוָה לְפָנֶיךָ* (*I will proclaim my name, Yahweh, before you*). This announcement alone with its emphasis on the proclamation of the divine name intimates the nature of Moses' request is centered on character, i.e., the concern of verse 13 rather than verse 12. It reminds us of the wording of verse 12 where it is stated that Yahweh intimately knows Moses *בְּשֵׁם*, his character or reputation. According to Yahweh's positive announcement in verse 19, soon Moses will be able to say the same of Yahweh's character and reputation.

4. The final factor is the LXX and its rendering of *הוֹדַעְנִי נָא אֶת דְּרֹכְךָ*. The LXX renders Moses' request as *ἐμφανίσσον μοι σεαυτὸν* (*reveal yourself to me*). The force of the Greek verb means to make known by words or deeds.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, we interpret the nature of Moses' plea as a special request to know God's character more deeply. As such it becomes the central plea of the paragraph subordinating the request for accompaniment on the journey. We do not deny that he eventually pleads for a personal appearance, as the subsequent dialogue reflects: *הֲרָאִנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ* (*cause me to see*

<sup>27</sup> This could be elliptical.

<sup>28</sup> Cf. Thayer.

your glory)<sup>29</sup> but it is the sort of appearance that, in Moses' experience, was often attached to God's self-revelation. While guaranteeing his accompaniment would have solved what for Moses was the divine presence problem, it would not have solved the deeper problem: reconciling God to a sinful people. So Moses' request "should be interpreted as an attempt to press behind the immediate problem to the heart of the matter; to solve the impasse of Yahweh's refusal in terms of seeking a fuller and deeper knowledge of Yahweh's character and purposes than has hitherto been revealed..."<sup>30</sup> Moses needs more revelation and seeks for deeper and fuller understanding into Yahweh's nature at a crucial moment in its history. This is the nature of Moses' first plea.

#### **IV. The Nature of Moses' Second Plea - 33:18**

When Moses requests to see God's glory it appears that he is literally seeking a glimpse of Yahweh. This assertion is based on two observations: 1. The כְּבוֹד יְהוָה (*glory of the Lord*) is generally something visible.<sup>31</sup> Sarna notes how the visible instances of כְּבוֹד יְהוָה can be characterized by a mass

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<sup>29</sup>See Section IV below entitled, *The Nature of Moses' Second Plea* regarding the connection between glory and Yahweh's presence.

<sup>30</sup> R. W. Moberly, *At the Mountain of God: Story and Theology in Exodus* 32-34 (Sheffield: JSOT) 73.

<sup>31</sup> The first instance of the "glory of the Lord" is found in Exodus 16:7 and is an outward, visible sign of his presence. Other references in Exodus are: 16:10, 24:16, 17; 28:2, 29:43. Further evidence that Moses' request is for an actual appearance lies in the ongoing theme and question of divine presence in the entire narrative.



experience, distant from the onlookers and at God's initiative.<sup>32</sup> We note the difference, however, with Moses. Moses, not Yahweh, initiates the idea. And the request is individual in nature and extremely close at hand.<sup>33</sup> However, the request is curious because, in the manner outlined above, Moses has seen Yahweh's glory before. We suggest that due to the personal nature of the request, Moses wants to see Yahweh beyond the barrier of the cloud, without Moses' view being obstructed because of the cloud. 2. The second reason for our assertion that Moses is literally seeking a glimpse of Yahweh lies in the precise wording of Yahweh's response.

#### **V. The Nature of Yahweh's response - 33:19-23**

In response to both of Moses' pleas, Yahweh warns him that while a revelation of Yahweh's character is forthcoming, and while there is a place for Moses to see Yahweh's glory, it will not, and indeed cannot, be an unmediated encounter per Moses' second request (33:18). Yahweh warns him of the necessary precautionary measures and prepares him for the experience. Verse 19 summarizes how Yahweh plans to fulfill Moses' requests. Regarding his request, *הֲרֵאֵנִי נָא אֶת כְּבוֹדְךָ* (*cause me to see your glory*) he announces the following: *טוֹבִי* (*my goodness*) will pass and while *כְּבוֹדִי* (*my glory*) passes I

<sup>32</sup> N. M. Sarna, *Exodus*, 87.

<sup>33</sup> This is evidenced by the anthropomorphism which prepares the reader for a very personal and intimate encounter with Yahweh (33:20-23).

will cover you until עבר' (I pass by). Both the wording and the progression of the paragraph are crucial. It seems the terms כבוד and טוב are used synonymously and interchangeably. Yahweh's glory is his goodness; and his goodness is his glory according to the wording of the text.<sup>34</sup> And as Yahweh himself states, this equates to seeing HIM pass by. This answer further substantiates our claim above that Moses was requesting a glimpse of Yahweh beyond the confines of the cloud.

Regarding Moses' request to know Yahweh's ways, i.e., his nature and character (33:13) Yahweh announces that his name, Yahweh, will be proclaimed before Moses and in so doing declares, וְחַנּוּתִי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲחַן וְרַחֲמֵי אֶת אֲשֶׁר אֲרַחֵם (I will be compassionate to whom I will be compassionate and gracious to whom I will be gracious).<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Yahweh's טוב (goodness) is also spoken about in scripture as something visible. Yahweh made his goodness known by his works among the people and the blessings he bestowed on them (I Chron. 16:24; Psm. 25:7; 27:13; 128:5; 145:7; Neh. 9:25). This is the only place in the Bible where טוב and כבוד are linked making this combination unique to Exodus 34. We might also note the possible covenant implications of the term טוב as in the treaty pair, שְׁלָם וְטָבָה in Deut. 23:7, [W. Moran, "A note on the Treaty Terminology of the Sefire Stelas," JNES XXII, #3 (July, 1963)].

<sup>35</sup> Together with Ex. 3:14, 33:19 contains a peculiar Semitic idiom which S. R. Driver has called the *idem per idem*. This idiom is used when neither the means nor the desire to further elaborate exists. In this way the *idem per idem* functions as a closure device to terminate debate (Jack R. Lundbom, "God's Use of the *Idem per Idem* to Terminate Debate," HTR, 71 1978) 193-201). For other examples of this see: Gen. 43:14; Ex. 4:13; 16:23. We can see how this statement does close the discussion because Moses is silent until after the theophany (34:9). Only then does he appropriately fall prostrate and make his final plea.

## **VI. The Nature of the Preparation before the Declaration - 34:1-4**

In addition to the warning, the Lord commands Moses to cut two new tables;<sup>36</sup> to be ready in the morning and ascend Sinai, all reminiscent of the Exodus 19 theophany and the initial covenant. Throughout the narrative, mention of the tables of stone seems to inform the reader of the status of the relationship between Yahweh and Israel.<sup>37</sup> This is one indicator that the idea of covenant renewal provides the context for the promised theophany of 33:19.<sup>38</sup> Another indicator of the covenant renewal context is the parallels with Exodus 19 and 20.<sup>39</sup> They may be summarized as:

1. The verbal similarity relative to the mountain's holiness is stressed.<sup>40</sup>

2. The similar cloud phenomenon surrounding the event.<sup>41</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Deut. 10:3 recounts the making of the ark prior to Moses' ascending Sinai for the second time.

<sup>37</sup> Ex. 32:15-16 informs the reader of the witness to the new and fresh covenant God made with Israel; Ex. 33:19 informs the reader of the shattered relationship; and 34:1 informs the reader of the forthcoming restoration.

<sup>38</sup> See discussion below on the literary function of Exodus 34:6-7.

<sup>39</sup> Commentators notice the similarities and differences between the theophany of Exodus 19 and Exodus 34. The public nature of Exodus 19 verses the private nature of the Exodus 34 revelation and rightly: (Childs, *Exodus*, 597; Moberly, *Mountain*, 84; S. J. Hafemann, *Paul and Moses* [Peabody:Hendrickson, 1996] 216).

<sup>40</sup> Ex. 34:3 and 19:12-13a

<sup>41</sup> Ex. 33:5 and 19:16 the description here includes thunder and lightning unlike 33:5.

3. The similar structure and content regarding the covenant and its stipulations.

4. The similarities regarding the promise of deliverance.<sup>42</sup>

5. The similarities regarding the disclosure of the covenant maker.<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the tables of stone and the parallels with Exodus 19-20, there is yet another indicator of the covenant renewal theme in the context: the establishment of Moses' role as covenant mediator in 19-24 and the reinforcement of that role due to the calf incident. As already noted in our discussion of 33:12-17, the grounds for covenant renewal have been established on the basis of Moses' relationship before God.

God's gracious and merciful character leads the way and now initiates the replacement of the tablets as covenant witnesses. The tablets are essential to the account and, indeed, indicative of the covenant renewal process and context established in 34:1-4.

### *1.2.3 Summary of the Literary Context*

In this survey of the literary context of the declaration we have been seeking to determine the nature of Israel's problem and the nature of Moses' petitions before Yahweh.

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<sup>42</sup> Ex. 34:11ff is speaking of the future enemies of the land; 20:1ff spoke of what Yahweh had already done with the Egyptians.

<sup>43</sup> Ex. 20:1-2 and 34:6-7.

Simply stated, Israel needs to secure Yahweh's forgiveness. And Moses needs nothing less than a revelation from God in order to know Yahweh's intentions with Israel. Thus his two requests; to know Yahweh's nature and to see Yahweh take center stage in the discussion. The critical nature of their need determines the nature of the upcoming revelation. In the hour of Israel's need for reconciliation and forgiveness, he is about to meet that need and fulfill his promise to Moses in the theophany of Exodus 34:6-7 by revealing himself as:

יהוה יהוה אל רחום וחנון  
ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת  
נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון  
ופשע וחטאה ונקמה לא ינקמה  
פקד עון אבות על בנים ועל  
בני בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים

*(Yahweh, Yahweh! A God compassionate and gracious, patient, firmly loyal and faithful, guarding covenant-loyalty to thousands of generations; forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin; but he will certainly not declare the guilty innocent; imposing the guilt of the fathers upon the children and on the grandchildren; and on the third and fourth generations.)*

and in this he declares his name preeminently.

### 1.3 The Literary Function and Form

#### 1.3.1 *The Pericope's Function as a Response*

The Exodus 34:6-7 declaration functions as Yahweh's response to Moses' two intercessions, and it has a revelatory function for Moses personally. It also functions in the narrative sequence as Yahweh's final answer to the golden calf incident. With the double declaration of his name prefacing the theophany, Yahweh underlines and confirms his sufficiency to attend to their needs.<sup>44</sup> Yahweh is justifying and authorizing his role in the golden calf incident. Therefore, the declaration is essential to its present context. The exercise of Yahweh's mercy as revealed in this declaration brings the golden calf incident to an amazing conclusion. For indeed, the people legally deserved the full force of imprecation for breaking covenant. But instead of Yahweh seizing and destroying the vassal, which was a customary punishment for covenant breakers among the gods in the ancient Near East, Yahweh is patient with Israel and does not exhaust his wrath but reveals his gracious character.<sup>45</sup> In this sense, we have an unexpected conclusion to the golden calf incident.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>See Chapter two for a discussion of the Tetragrammaton whereby we assert that the name of God promises action.

<sup>45</sup> M. G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans) 1963, 22.

<sup>46</sup>It should be noted that this is often how Yahweh deals with covenant breakers beginning with Genesis 3.

### 1.3.2 *The Pericope's Function as a Preamble for Covenant Renewal*

Our pericope has another function flowing directly from that mentioned above. For on the basis of Yahweh's great  $\text{גִּדּוּל}$  character, he provides for the cutting of two new stone tables (34:1). These tablets are a tangible token of renewal and signify that Israel would be forgiven and that the relationship was about to be restored from God's side.<sup>47</sup> Immediately following the declaration Yahweh proceeds to renew the covenant, (34:10ff) without which the subsequent history of Israel would look entirely different.

In this first covenantal renewal in the Bible, the people do not gather to pledge their undying covenant loyalty as vigorously as before (19:8; 24:3,7). Rather, Yahweh appears to pledge his undying covenant loyalty to Israel and future generations in this supreme declaration of himself in Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>48</sup> In this manner the passage functions as a springboard for Israel's future as Yahweh's covenant people. Thus, the declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 as the self-disclosure of the covenant maker functions as the preamble for the covenant renewal where the initiator of the treaty is

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<sup>47</sup> U. Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Exodus* (Jerusalem: Magnus) 1974.

<sup>48</sup> Ex. 34:32 seems to reflect a gathering of Israel in order for the nation to pledge its allegiance to Yahweh. The text is silent about the people's response to the words of the covenant after the golden calf incident. But one assumes this was the case from 19:8 and 24:3, 7. What does stand out, however, is Yahweh's covenant loyalty over and above the people in the covenant renewal.

identified by his name, Yahweh, and by the long list of attributes attached.<sup>49</sup>

### *1.3.3 The Pericope's Function as "Divine Self-Revelational Material"*

Since the passage is the self-disclosure of the covenant maker it, therefore, fits into a discernible literary grouping easily identifiable in the book of Exodus. The nomenclature we have given to this particular body of material in Exodus is "Divine Self-Revelational Material." The texts that we are referring to are Exodus 3:6-15; 6:2-8; 20:1-6; 34:5-7. The basis for this nomenclature issues from distinct features that seem to be characteristic of these four passages. What are the features distinguishing these texts as "divine self-revelational material?" 1. Each passage declares the name of

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<sup>49</sup> As D. J. McCarthy has observed, however, the historical recounting of the sovereign's past dealing with the vassal (the "historical prologue") as well as the blessings and curses are omitted. Regarding the historical prologue, he states, "it is the mere presence of Yahweh which founds the covenant. This is the antithesis of the historical prologue. It is not what Yahweh *has done* which is the source of the covenant, it is what He *is*...that is enough and more to establish a ground for what follows"(167). Perhaps it is even more appropriate to say that the source of the covenant is to be found in what Yahweh *is doing*. Since Yahweh is forgiving Israel that constitutes the basis of the renewal. In this manner, verses 9-10 function approximately as an historical prologue, although the "history" is very immediate, i.e., "I am forgiving you now (as you have asked) by making a covenant with you. Therefore, the terms of the covenant are restated (vs 11) "obey what I command you this day" in accordance with the principles of literary composition in the Ancient Near East. Sarna 137.



the deity, Yahweh. 2. Each passage discloses either a characteristic activity of the deity, his attributes or both. 3. With the exception of Exodus 6, each passage contains a visible manifestation of God's presence, i.e, fire or cloud. 4. The characteristic activity of the deity in each passage is deliverance.

There is a progression as it relates to the deliverance in each of the texts: Exodus 3 announces Yahweh's initial intentions of deliverance when he calls to Moses from the bush (3:7-12). Exodus 6 announces that Yahweh will deliver Israel in spite of Pharaoh's resolute refusal. It further reveals how Yahweh intends to take Israel as his covenant people. Exodus 20 announces that Yahweh has delivered Israel and so he proceeds to make the covenant with them. In the preface of this covenant, Yahweh proclaims he is a redeeming God. In the preface of the Exodus 34 covenant, Yahweh announces that he is a forgiving God. He states how he will continue keeping covenant with Israel; and in effect, he has delivered them once again, but this time, from the bondage of their own sin. This body of material reflects how the name Yahweh resonates with the concepts of covenant and deliverance.

So by the time the reader approaches the final stage in this progression (the Exodus 34:6-7 declaration), he or she immediately notices a fuller description of the divine name than in the preceding revelational passages. Yahweh's portrait of himself in Exodus 34 is further fleshed out; and this

particular portrayal left a decisive stamp on the entire Old Testament.<sup>50</sup>

Thus the revelation of the divine presence to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 is situated last and functions as the final stage in the progression of divine self-revelation that commenced in Exodus 3. But by no means does this make it least significant. For as we will see in our exegetical analysis, it takes pride of place among this corpus of revelational material on account of its lexical content and enduring nature.

The literary form of this declaration fits into a genre of literature known in the ancient Near East as divine or royal titularies. The form, context and purpose of an ancient Near Eastern titulary exhibits a striking parallel with what we find in Exodus 34:6-7.<sup>51</sup> Concerning the form: the divine titulary first announces the name of the god or king. Subsequent to this, a string of epithets follows describing that god or king. Usually, "the epithets are in the form of participles, although these are often intermixed with verbs in the perfect."<sup>52</sup> An

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<sup>50</sup>His benevolent actions towards Israel as decreed in Exodus 34:6-7 set the pattern for Israel's future petitions, proclamations and praises. In times of sin, in times of restoration and in times of blessing, all Israel knew Yahweh on the basis of this revelation to Moses. See Numb. 14:18-19; Deut. 7:9-10; 1 Ki. 8:23; Neh. 1:5; 9:27ff; Dan. 9:4; Jer. 32:18; Nah. 1:3; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18-19; Psa. 86:15; 103:8,11,17; 145:8.

<sup>51</sup>J. J. Niehaus proposes that in addition to Exodus 34:6-7, Isaiah 44:24-28, Amos 4:13, 5:8, 9:5-6 contain this royal titulary. See "Amos Commentary" (323-323) Ed., T. E. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Baker) 1992.

<sup>52</sup>J. J. Niehaus, "Amos Commentary" (323-323) Ed., T. E. McComiskey, *The Minor Prophets: An Exegetical and Expository Commentary* (Grand Rapids:

example of this comes from the annals of the Assyrian king, Tiglath-pileser. His second-year campaign begins in such a manner:

Tiglath-pileser, valiant hero,  
who opens ways through the mountains,  
who subdues the insubmissive,  
who overthrows all fierce foes.<sup>53</sup>

Concerning the the context of the titularies: An Assyrian king or god often portrayed himself in no uncertain terms, as suggested above, in the context of a vassal state rebellion. This rebellion signified a broken covenant. Under these circumstances, the purpose of the titulary becomes evident. The sovereign is asserting his absolute authority over the vassal. And in the titulary with Tiglath-pileser, the king is asserting his authority to punish his rebellious vassals.<sup>54</sup>

Therefore, the form of Yahweh's declaration finds a parallel with divine or royal titularies in the ancient world. Yahweh's numerous epithets lauded after Israel breaks covenant with the golden calf serve to underscore Yahweh's power, authority and sovereignty over his rebellious vassal. However, Yahweh, unlike Tiglath-pileser, asserts his authority to forgive rather than to punish his rebellious vassal, Israel.

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Baker) 1992.

<sup>53</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> I am thankful to J. J. Niehaus who brought this important observation to my attention.

*1.3.4 Summary of the Literary Function and Form of Exodus 3  
4:6-7*

Our structural analysis revealed that our pericope is important by virtue of its carefully arranged position in the book of Exodus. By asking how the pericope functions in this environment we have discovered the following:

1. It functions as Yahweh's response to Moses' intercessions.
2. It functions as Yahweh's final and unexpected response to the golden calf incident.
3. It functions as a preamble to the subsequent covenant renewal and serves then as a new beginning for Israel' future as Yahweh's covenant people.
4. It functions as the concluding stage, but most important stage in the progression of the divine self-revelational material in terms of content and subsequent impact on Israelite history.
5. Its form is a common genre of literature in the Near East known as the divine or royal titulary.

## CHAPTER TWO

### "The Meaning of the Declaration"

#### An Exegetical Analysis of Exodus 34:5-6

##### 2.1 Lexical Data

The nature and characteristic activities lauded of the deity in Exodus 34:6-7 speak of the name Yahweh rather than that of just any deity. Our analysis, therefore, begins, as the declaration itself does, with the Tetragrammaton.

In partial fulfillment of Moses' wish to see God (33:18), Yahweh causes himself to be seen in a "word picture." Yahweh proclaims his own name not once but twice, unlike the other "divine self-revelational material."<sup>55</sup> Double name calling, though not unique in the biblical terrain,<sup>56</sup> is unique here in Exodus 34 relative to the Tetragrammaton. Here and nowhere else do we find the repetition of the divine name proclaimed by Yahweh himself.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> We have deemed these texts as "Divine Self-Revelational Material" for several reasons:

1. They involve the pronouncement of the deity's name.
2. They involve the self-disclosure of the deity, i.e. his attributes and his characteristic activities.
3. They involve a visible manifestation of the deity's presence.
4. They involve deliverance which appears to be the characteristic activity of the deity (see above).

The texts we are referring to as revelational are Ex. 3:13-15; Ex. 6:3-8; Ex. 20; Ex. 34:6-7. See detailed discussion in Chapter 1 (1.3.3).

<sup>56</sup> With the exception of 2 Sam. 18:33, God is calling out to humans.

The individual's name is called twice and usually signifies an important message or command from God. See Gen. 22:11; Gen. 46:2; Ex. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:3-10; 2 Sam. 18:33; Mark 15:34; Matt. 23:37; Acts 9:4; Luke 10:4.

Two questions will now govern the course of our discussion on the Tetragrammaton and the subsequent interpretation of Exodus 34:6-7. What denotation does a name possess in the Old Testament? And what kind of name does Israel's deity possess?

### 2.1.1 The Terms שם and הויה

#### שם

When one surveys the use of this word in the Old testament, three basic categories of meaning reflect its occurrences (over 800 times, cf. *BDB*). A person's specific שם speaks of his or her essential character or nature (cf. *BDB*). It could reveal the character, personality or the destiny of an individual. For example, in Gen. 27:36 we learn how appropriate the name "Jacob" (יַעֲקֹב meaning "grasp by the heel," "supplanter or cheater") was for this individual who had the tendency to deceive.<sup>58</sup> Closely attached to one's character was one's reputation (Gen.12:2), renown or fame (Ez.39:13). This reputation can be positive<sup>59</sup> or negative.<sup>60</sup> "When the character and achievements of a person become widely known, he gains a reputation. There is as it were an extension

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<sup>57</sup> For a discussion of the grammar and how some have seen this as a proclamation by Moses, see the discussion below.

<sup>58</sup> Gen. 25:26; 32-34; See also 2 Sam. 25:25; Gen. 3:20; 11:9; 21:3,6; 2 Samuel 4:21, etc.

<sup>59</sup> 2 Sam. 18:30 referring to David; Gen. 12:2 referring to Abram.

<sup>60</sup> Gen. 27:36 referring to Jacob. Also Gen. 11:3; 2 Sam. 18:30; 2 Sam. 8:13.

of his personality."<sup>61</sup> However, one's character or nature could also change. Indicative of a character change was, therefore, a name change signifying a new status, a new beginning, a new person or a new relationship.<sup>62</sup> Finally, one's ~~name~~ could carry prophetic import as numerous passages testify.<sup>63</sup> Thus a name expressed more than an identification; it expressed one's identity. To know one's name was, in effect, to know a person.

How does this aid us in our study of the divine self-disclosure of the name, Yahweh? If a mere human name may carry information regarding the person's character, perhaps the divine name may also yield important information with respect to the character of the deity.<sup>64</sup> As Walter Eichrodt suggests, "...the question, therefore, of what kind of name the God of Israel bore is no idle one, but can be the means of arriving at an important insight into Israel's religious thought."<sup>65</sup> Let us now turn our attention to the divine name *par excellence*. What is the meaning of this name, Yahweh, that the Bible itself describes as the "glorious and awful name"?<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> R. Abba, "Name" in *IDB*, III (New York: Abingdon, 1962), 502.

<sup>62</sup> D. K. Stuart, "Name" in *ISBE*, III See Gen. 17:5; 32:28; 2 Sam. 12:25; Ruth 1:20; of note is Hos. 1:9 where God changes his own name from ~~אֱלֹהִים~~ to ~~אֱלֹהִים לֹא~~ "I am" to "I am not your I am."

<sup>63</sup> Isa. 7:3, 14; 9:6; 8:1-4; Hos. 1:4, 6, 9; Jer. 20:3-6; Ez. 23.

<sup>64</sup> G. H. Parke-Taylor, *Yahweh: The Divine Name in the Bible* (Ontario: Laurier Press, 1975) 4.

<sup>65</sup> W. Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1961) 178.

<sup>66</sup> Deut. 28:58

## יהוה

Next to Elohim, the Tetragrammaton is the major biblical designation for God.<sup>67</sup> While Elohim is a generic and not a "name brand" designation for deity,<sup>68</sup> Yahweh is a name for God all his own.<sup>69</sup> And contrary to the opinion of modern source critics who purport that the name Yahweh was unknown before the time of Moses, the name, in its earliest biblical usage, reaches back to Genesis.<sup>70</sup> In Genesis we find that people called on the name of Yahweh, built altars to Yahweh, were worshipping Yahweh, and attributed specific conduct and words to him.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> It is used 6,823 times according to BDB, 217

<sup>68</sup> See Ex. 23:13; Deut. 31:18; Judg. 10:16; Jer. 5:19; 2 Kings 18:33; 2 Sam. 5:17; 2 Kings 18:24

<sup>69</sup> Ex. 3:13-15; 6:3-8; 20; 33:19; 34:6-7, etc.

<sup>70</sup> Gen. 4:1,26; 9:26; 12:8, 13:10; 13,14; 15:1, 4, 6, 18, etc. Their argument is based on Exodus 6:3 where the Lord explains to Moses that by his name Yahweh he had not been known to the patriarchs. They state the origin of Yahweh's name is here. As to the appearance of the name in Genesis, the discrepancy is attributed to the existence of the J source, a different documentary source woven in the text. It is argued that for theological reasons the J source used the name anachronistically from the start, but the E and P sources avoided it until the period of the Exodus. For a thorough discussion refuting this view see, A. Motyer, *The Revelation of the Divine Name*, (Great Britain: Green and Co, 1959). For an explanation of the "Kenite Hypothesis" that states Moses' father-in-law Jethro, a Midian resident, introduced him to Yahweh so that the mention of "the god of your father" in Exodus 3:6 refers both to Moses' spiritual father and physical father-in-law, Jethro, see G. H. Parker-Taylor, *Yahweh*, 40. See also H. G. May, "The God of My Fathers - A Study of Patriarchal Religion," *JBR*, IX (1941):155. See also D. N. Freedman, "YHWH" in *TDOT*, Vol.5, (Michigan:Eerdmans, 1986) 500-521.

<sup>71</sup> J. A. Motyer, *Revelation* 25.



The appearance of the Tetragrammaton does occur in sources outside the Bible, albeit in a limited fashion. With one exception, the occurrences are found in blessing and cursing formulas or in allusions to these formulas in cultic references and titles.<sup>72</sup> For example, the earliest extrabiblical evidence is the Mesha inscription (Moabite Stone) dated ca. 840-830 B.C.<sup>73</sup> And according to D. N. Freedman, these "19 occurrences of the Tetragrammaton in the form *yhwh* bear witness to the reliability of the MT in this respect..."<sup>74</sup>

While the etymology of the term has been hotly debated, scholarly consensus appeals to the derivation of the Tetragrammaton from the verb *הָיָה* whose meaning includes "be, become, happen."<sup>75</sup>

In spite of this general agreement,<sup>76</sup> however, there is no unanimity regarding the verb's original form. Two common views prevail. The first view takes the verb as a *qal*

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<sup>72</sup> D. N. Freedman, *TDOT*, 502.

<sup>73</sup> This inscription is the longest known royal inscription in the greater Palestine area. Mesha, King of Moab, recounts the favors of Chemosh for delivering Moab from Israel's control (*ABD*, IV, 708). It was Chemosh who enabled Mesha to state, "I took the vessels of Yahweh and dragged them before Chemosh" (Trans. D. N. Freedman, *TDOT*, 502).

<sup>74</sup> D. N. Freedman, *TDOT*, 505. Notation of the extrabiblical evidence is clearly listed where attestation of the Tetragrammaton seems unquestionable. His survey includes onomastic evidence from Western Semitic and Akkadian source.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid.*, 500

<sup>76</sup> Excluding notably J. B. Payne (*TWOT*, 210) who is of the opinion that the origin of the term is unknown and that it merely, "sounded something like the verb *הָיָה* in Moses' day."

conjugation, with either a present sense or an imperfect, future sense. Thus the possible translation values, "I am who/what I am" or "I will be who/what I will be" The second view takes the verb as a hiphil conjugation, "I cause to be" or "I will bring into existence."

The most prominent voice to bolster the hiphil as the original conjugation of the verb has been W. F. Albright. Quoting Egyptian texts and appealing to philology, Albright asserted how the Tetragrammaton could not be the ordinary qal imperfect of the verb.<sup>77</sup> He championed the view that this hiphil verbal form was probably part of a longer expression, i.e., a theophoric sentence name. From the longer expression emerged the shorter expression of the Tetragrammaton. Thus Albright believed the name Yahweh was the more primitive form from which all other reduced or abbreviated forms were born.<sup>78</sup>

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<sup>77</sup> His claims are as follows: If it were Qal, in the historical evolution of the language, the progression of the forms would be *yihwayu* > *yihwe* > *yihe* thus ending up as **YHYH** in Hebrew. But if it were Hiphil, the progression of the forms would be *yihwayu* > *yahwiyu* > *yahwe* thus ending up as **YHWH** in Hebrew with the appropriate abbreviated form *yahu* (**YHW**). Thus, he transposes the form into a third person singular which translates, "He causes to be what comes into existence." (Albright, *Stone Age*, 15-18, 260). See also his article "The Name of Yahweh," (*JBL* XLIII [1924], 370-378). According to R. de Vaux, Albright has in his favor the additional evidence from the Aramaic and Syriac that make use of the causative form of the verb "to be." But de Vaux's purpose is to expose the problematic nature of taking the verb as an original hiphil. ("The Revelation of the Divine Name YHWH" in *Proclamation and Presence, O.T. essays in Honor of Gwynne Henton Davies* [London: S.C.M. Press], 1970, 63).

<sup>78</sup> For slight variations yet providing the same interpretation see also D. N. Freedman, "The Name of the God of Moses," *JBL* 89 (1960), 151-156

The argument and preference for the hiphil is further buttressed by appealing to contextual evidence. The Exodus points to a future event in which Yahweh "will bring into being," or "create" the nation of Israel.

The voices opposing Albright in favor of an original qal formation are many.<sup>79</sup> His opponents state that due to the non-existence of the hiphil form of יהוה in Hebrew, much of his evidence is relegated to creating a form *ex nihilo*. In particular, scholars take issue with Albright and his followers for the elaborate changes made to the MT which produces an unnecessary reconstruction of the MT of Exodus 3:14f. Furthermore, in Exodus 3:14f where the text itself seems to be supplying its own explanation of the name, Yahweh's role as "creator" is not apparent. However, his role as redeemer and God of the covenant is apparent.<sup>80</sup> What then are our concluding affirmations concerning the Tetragrammaton?

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or F. M. Cross, Jr., *Canaanite Myth and Hebrew Epic* (Cambridge: Harvard Press 1973) 65.

<sup>79</sup> See R. de Vaux, *Proclamation and Presence*. Also S. Mowinckel, "The Name of the God of Moses," *HUCA*, 32 (1961): 128. J. A. Moyter, *Revelation*, 21-22; A. B. Davidson, *Theology* 54-56; W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenant* (New York: Thomas Nelson, 1984). See W. Kaiser, Jr., *Exodus*, 323., who maintains that Yahweh is the qal imperfect form but he makes a grammatical shift from the first person to the third person based on the interchange between an initial aleph with an initial ' . Also M. Noth, *Exodus* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1962) 44.

<sup>80</sup> Dumbrell, *Covenant* 83.

### 2.1.2 Summary of the Tetragrammaton

On the basis that Exodus 3:14-15 does not contain a hiphil form, but seems to employ the qal imperfect of  $\text{הָיָה}$ , we would more readily connect the Tetragrammaton to an original qal construction. We prefer the translation "I will be who/what I will be" as opposed to the present (static) sense since the force of  $\text{הָיָה}$  should be understood in a more dynamic sense.<sup>81</sup> This understanding best suits the context of the Exodus events where Yahweh's revelations to Moses and the people consist of his redemptive acts and not the inner nature of his being.<sup>82</sup>

The question we have been asking all along is what kind of a name does Israel's God bear? By establishing the association of the Tetragrammaton to the qal imperfect of the verb "to be" we are stating with Davidson that "it refers, not to what God will be in Himself; it is no prediction regarding His nature, but one regarding what He will approve Himself to others, regarding what He will show Himself to be."<sup>83</sup> This special name of God introduced to Moses connotes an active being or presence not a static one. "Yahweh Is, and his Is-ness means Presence"<sup>84</sup> as the Exodus 3 passage itself promises (3:12, 4:12,15).<sup>85</sup> Yahweh is the God whose very name promises

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<sup>81</sup> R. K. Harrison, *Old Testament Introduction* (Grand Rapids:Eerdmans, 1969) 580.

<sup>82</sup> See Ex. 3:7-11; 6:2-8; 20:1-5; 34:10ff.

<sup>83</sup> A. B. Davidson, *Theology*, 71.

<sup>84</sup> J. I. Durham, *Exodus*, 39.

<sup>85</sup> Ex. 3:12; 4:12,15.

action thereby declaring his sufficiency to attend to the needs of his people as Moyter explains.<sup>86</sup>

With this general understanding of the Tetragrammaton, we can now approach the declaration. How then does the declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 and the double use of the Tetragrammaton meet Israel's need to be reconciled to God? We shall see that, the name of Israel's God, Yahweh, proclaimed in Exodus 34:6-7 provides profound insight into Israel's religious need and thought.

### 2.1.3 Translation and grammar of Exodus 34:5

וירד יהוה בענן ויִתְּצַב עִמּוֹ שֵׁם וַיִּקְרָא בְּשֵׁם יְהוָה

*(Yahweh descended in the cloud and [Moses] stood with him there and [Yahweh] proclaimed the name of Yahweh)*

As promised from 33:19, Yahweh himself descends (וירד) in typical theophanic manner, in the cloud.<sup>87</sup> The syntax of verse 5 allows for either Moses or Yahweh to be the subject of (ויקרא) and (ויתצב). But, fortunately, the surrounding context and progression of the events helps us to determine the subject of these verbs more decisively. Thus far in Exodus the verbs נצב and יצב have had Moses as their subject relative to "standing" with Yahweh on Sinai.<sup>88</sup> Likewise in Exodus 33:19 the verb קרא

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<sup>86</sup> J. A. Motyer, *Revelation*, 24.

<sup>87</sup> Ex. 19:9, 16; 13:21; 14:19,20,24.

<sup>88</sup> In Ex. 33:21 Yahweh, as the subject, is speaking to Moses about the special place Moses can stand to see Yahweh. Likewise in 34:2, Yahweh refers Moses to that special place on top of the mountain where Moses

has Yahweh as its subject relative to "proclaiming" his own name.<sup>89</sup> For these reasons the proper subject of יָצַב in verse 5 best suits Moses; and the subject of קָרָא in verses 5 and 6 best suits Yahweh. Thus in verse 5 Yahweh makes good on his promise and, as Moberly has correctly observed, "states in introductory form what vv. 6f. will explain and expand - the meaning of the name of Yahweh."<sup>90</sup>

#### 2.1.4 Translation and Grammar of Exodus 34:6

**ויעבר יהוה על פניו**

**ויקרא יהוה אל רחום וחנן ארך אפים ורב חסד ואמת**

*(And Yahweh passed before him [Moses] and proclaimed, Yahweh, Yahweh <sup>91</sup> [is<sup>92</sup>] a God compassionate and gracious, patient,*

*will encounter God. In keeping with this idea, we understand the subject of the verb "to stand" in Ex. 34:5 as Moses.*

<sup>89</sup> It is unusual to have God calling out his name and this is the only instance of this. Normally it is the worshipper doing this as in Gen. 4:26; 1 Kings 18:24; Psalm. 116:17; Joel 2:32; Zeph. 3:9. We agree with Moberly who regards this as a deliberate inversion of the phrase for the purpose of stressing Yahweh's initiative at the hour of Israel's great need. The fact that Yahweh proclaims his name first is "a striking conception of the basis of Israel's worship" *Mountain*, 77. For this reason some take Moses as the preferred subject of 34:5ff. However, the context should govern the use of this phrase as outlined above. Numb. 14:17ff provides further support for our assertion. In the Wilderness of Paran, once again Israel rebelled and once again God threatens disinheritance. Moses intercedes for Israel. The nature of the intercession reflects the wording of the declaration in Ex. 34:6-7. The intercession attributes the utterance of the words to Yahweh. It seems most likely that Yahweh is the subject of קָרָא.

<sup>90</sup> Moberly, *Mountain*, 86.

*firmly loyal and faithful*<sup>93</sup>)

A few comments are necessary regarding the translation options relative to the double use of the Tetragrammaton.<sup>94</sup> One option is to take it as a deliberate repetition or exclamation. Another possibility is to take the first Yahweh as the subject of the verb *וַיִּקְרָא*. We believe the evidence favors the former. The strongest justification for this is the testimony of the ancient versions.<sup>95</sup> Further justification for translating *יְהוָה יְהוָה* as a double exclamation is based on the numerous occurrences of double name calling throughout Scripture.<sup>96</sup> Although it is typically God calling on somebody other than himself in these other references, the repetition and exclamation seem deliberate and similar to what we find in Exodus 34:6-7. We should also note the disjunctive accent that indicates there may be a first major division in the first half of the verse. This accent could be construed to support the translation of the name as a repeated exclamation.<sup>97</sup>

There is less evidence to justify the first *יְהוָה* as the

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<sup>91</sup> The repetition of the divine name is supported by codex A of LXX, the Syriac, Targum and Vulgate. The LXX has *κύριος ο θεος*, "Lord God."

<sup>92</sup> See the grammatical discussion below.

<sup>93</sup> For justification of this translation see below.

<sup>94</sup> In terms of the original meaning of the Tetragrammaton see above for the comments pertaining to its etymology. Now as it is used in the passage, the true meaning of the Tetragrammaton unfolds.

<sup>95</sup> See note #85 above.

<sup>96</sup> Gen. 22:11; 46:2; Ex. 3:4; 1 Sam. 3:3-10; 2 Sam. 18:33; Luke 10:41; Matt. 23:37.

<sup>97</sup> See W. R. Scott, *A Simplified Guide to BHS* (Texas: Bibal, 1987) 29.

subject of  $\text{אלהים}$ . This option *may* have support from the parallel passage in Num.14:17-18 where Moses himself repeats the declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 in his intercession to Yahweh but without the double use of the Tetragrammaton. A strong case should not be based on this parallel, however. For if Ex.34 is Yahweh's own exclamation of himself, it does not follow that Moses would be inclined to repeat the exclamation in the context of Numbers. For all of these reasons, our translation reflects a repeated exclamation which is most probably a correct rendering of the Tetragrammaton. It adds an emotional force we deem appropriate to the progression of events.

Following the double pronunciation of the Tetragrammaton in verse 5 is a sequence of defining phrases. These take the form of a chain of indefinite attributive adjectives all modifying  $\text{אלהים}$ .<sup>98</sup> As mentioned above regarding  $\text{אלהים}$ , we favor interpreting the term not as a divine name but a common Semitic appellative for the "divinity."<sup>99</sup> The meaning and significance of Yahweh's name now unfolds with the list of these attributes (34:5) and the subsequent list of participial phrases (34:6). We shall examine each attribute in the remainder of this chapter and then each participial phrase in the next chapter in order to ascertain the meaning of the

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<sup>98</sup> Another suggestion is to take these defining phrases as predicates with Yahweh as the subject. Passages such as Deut. 6:4; Nahum 1:2-3 and Numb. 14:18 support this interpretation.

<sup>99</sup> For the evidence see Martin Rose, "Names of God in the O.T," *ABD*, IV, 1004. However, we admit the uncertainty of this assertion in our present context since  $\text{אלהים}$  could conceivably be another personal name.



declaration in Exodus 34:6-7.

#### 2.1.4.1 אל רחום (a compassionate God)

In the Old Testament, the adjective רחום typically occurs in parallel with חנון in a semantic word pair.<sup>100</sup> However, on two occasions רחום occurs alone in Deut. 4:31 and Ps.78:38. In its adjectival form it is used only of God. The adjective derives its meaning from the root of the related noun and verb used prominently in the Old Testament.

The root is related to and has similar meanings in Akkadian and Aramaic.<sup>101</sup> Generally speaking the root רחם refers to a deep inner feeling based on a "natural" bond (cf TWOT). Sometimes the root carries the idea of pity, i.e., the conqueror for the conquered.<sup>102</sup> Therefore, "love," "affection," "compassion" or "pity" are in the range of meaning for this root.<sup>103</sup>

Thus the adjective derived from this root characterizing God as רחום reflects God's affectionate nature.

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<sup>100</sup> Joel 2:12-14; Jonah 3:10-4:3; Psalm 86:5,15; 103:8-12, 17-18; 145:8-9; Neh.9:17-19; 31-32.

<sup>101</sup> Cf. Akk. *remum* ; Aramaic רחמן; D. N. Freedman also shows the connection of the word to the Arabic, "God Compassionate" 22.

<sup>102</sup> 1 Kings 8:50; Jer. 42:12; 6:23; 21:7; 50:42; Observe also Psalm 79:8; Neh. 9:26-31; Jer. 12:15, 30:18; Ez. 39:25; Mic. 7:19; Isa. 57:7.

<sup>103</sup> This root and its meaning differs from חמל and חוס in that the feelings attached are based on a natural bond of some sort. The other two words do not involve such an intimate bond but are feelings that flow from one to the other usually leading to an action to spare someone from a difficulty (cf. TWOT).

#### 2.1.4.2 אל חנון (A gracious God)

As stated above חנון occurs in parallel with רחום in a semantic word pair.<sup>104</sup> However, חנון occurs alone in Ex.22:26-28. In its adjectival form it is used only of God. But like רחום, the adjective חנון derives its basic meaning from the root of the related noun and verb that is prominent in the Old Testament.

Generally speaking the root חנן refers to grace or favor. It commonly describes the attitude of a superior rendering favor to an inferior who is in need. But the "emphasis is not upon the intrinsic status of the individuals so much as it is on the relation of capacity and need in a given situation."<sup>105</sup> Analogously, the Akkadian cognate *enenum* is almost always used of a king or god granting favor or privilege to someone.<sup>106</sup> Therefore, gracious or merciful are in the range of meanings for the adjective derived from this root and reflects God's merciful nature.

#### 2.1.4.3 The Phrase אל רחום וחנון in Exodus 34:6-7 (A God compassionate and gracious)

One quickly observes how these two words are richly semantically laden in their own right. However, used in this semantic word pair as they primarily are, this doublet is more

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<sup>104</sup> See above references.

<sup>105</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God compassionate," 11; See Gen. 30:27; 32:6; 39:4-6; 1 Sam. 16:20-22; 20:3.

<sup>106</sup> Cf. CAD, 301.

than a "standard cliché" used for Yahweh.<sup>107</sup> Together they portray Yahweh's deeply kind and affectionate nature in his handling of relationships. That Yahweh mentions these attributes of himself *first* in the declaration is particularly striking in light of the golden calf tragedy. A comparison with the declaration in Ex.20:5-6, a passage that preceded the calf crisis, helps our analysis:

	Ex. 20	Ex.34
Adjs.	קנא	רחום חנון ארך אפים רב חסד ואמת

Before the rebellion, Yahweh had recently won for himself a covenant people. On this basis, the victorious sovereign demands allegiance and loyalty from his people. Yahweh uses only one adjective, קנא (*jealous*) to describe his nature at that point of self-revelation to Israel. The "jealous God" concept predominates given the circumstances.

On the heels of the golden calf incident, after Israel's display of disloyalty to their new sovereign, Yahweh uses five adjectives to describe his nature in the self-revelation to Moses. The "compassionate and gracious God" concept predominates this revelation. Thus in Ex.34 there appears to

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<sup>107</sup> TDOT, 25.

be an expansion of the mercy theme when compared with Exodus 20:6a.

Indeed, we see the superiority of the suzerain ably answering the petition of the covenant mediator in this phrase. Moses, who we are told has found favor (33:17) was seeking the favor of the one controlling Israel's destiny (33:12-16). By using this pair of adjectives, Yahweh underlines and expresses his capacity to meet Israel's need as **אל רחום וחנון**.

#### 2.1.4.4 **אל ארך אפים** (*A Patient God*)

Outside of Exodus 34:6 and its parallels,<sup>108</sup> the phrase **אל ארך אפים** occurs only in Wisdom literature.<sup>109</sup> It is usually used to describe God. But the Wisdom literature refers to **אפים ארך** as a desirable trait of human character. It literally means "long of face" or "long of nose"<sup>110</sup> and is best translated as "slow to anger" or "patient." Yahweh's slowness to anger has been attested from the moment of Israel's first complaint at the sea (14:11-12). But now, as this explicit statement indicates, Yahweh asserts that the patient role he takes with Israel is a penetrating part of his nature. This phrase calls attention to the tension in the character of Israel's deity who can display both divine patience and divine

<sup>108</sup> By parallels we are referring to those places where our pericope is partially repeated. Cf. Numb. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Psm. 86:15; 103:8; 145:8; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Nahum 1:3; Isa. 48:9.

<sup>109</sup> Prov. 14:29; 15:18; 16:32; 19:11; Eccl. 7:8.

<sup>110</sup> "nose" is customarily used to describe the connection between snorting and anger. See Eze. 38:18; Psa. 18:8, 15; Ex. 15:8.

anger. And indeed, there are not a few occurrences of Yahweh demonstrating his wrath and fury already in Exodus - as well as throughout the Old Testament.<sup>111</sup> However, an important observation should be made relative to these instances. For while Yahweh does get angry, the emphasis does not lie on the *permanence* of his anger, but rather on its short duration.<sup>112</sup> This is attested in the book of Exodus<sup>113</sup> and particularly in Ex.32-34. That he *easily turns* from his anger suggests it is a slight momentary affliction; and while it is no doubt an affliction, it is nothing in comparison to his abiding and infinite patience.<sup>114</sup> On what basis is Yahweh slow to anger then? On the basis of his רַחוּם וְחַנּוּן, the deep affection that he has for Israel because of the special, unconditional relationship he established.

We now turn to the final qualifying phrase that is a fundamental aspect of Yahweh's character, רַב חַסֵּד וְאֱמֶת.

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<sup>111</sup> Gen. 32:23-33; Ex. 4:24; Deut. 29:27; Judg. 2:20; Josh. 23:16; Ezra 9:14; Ex. 32; Numb. 25; 1 Kings 11:9; 14:9, 15; 2 Kings 17:18; Amos 2:9-11; Hosea 11:3; Isa. 1:10-17, etc.

<sup>112</sup> Ps. 78:49; Jer. 3:5; Mic. 7:18; Isa. 12:1; 34:8; 63:4.

<sup>113</sup> Ex. 16:20-28; 32:7-14, 30-35; 33:3-6, 14.

<sup>114</sup> Ps. 103:8; Mic. 2:7.

#### 2.1.4.5 $\text{חסד}$ $\text{ב}$ <sup>115</sup>

The weighty term  $\text{חסד}$  occurs well over 200 times and in a variety of contexts in the Old Testament.<sup>116</sup> With the adjective  $\text{ב}$  it is used exclusively of Yahweh.<sup>117</sup> However, its usage without  $\text{ב}$  is well attested of both God and man throughout the Hebrew Bible. Due to the word's frequency, and the variety of contexts it appears in, we must confine our discussion of  $\text{חסד}$  to the book of Exodus. With this restriction our lexical analysis will be considerably streamlined and will revolve around the term's 'religious' or 'theological',<sup>118</sup> use and not its 'secular' use.<sup>119</sup>

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<sup>115</sup> The translation will follow after consideration of the entire phrase,  $\text{חסד ב ואמת}$ .

<sup>116</sup> According to *TDOT* it occurs nearly 250 times.

<sup>117</sup> Ex. 34:6; Psa. 85:15.

<sup>118</sup> According to Sakenfeld there are three main areas of the theological use of  $\text{חסד}$

1.  $\text{חסד}$  fulfills God's responsibility in acts of deliverance and protection.
2. God's  $\text{חסד}$  is delivering and protective power exercised on behalf of those who are obedient. But it is also unexpected forgiveness offered to the disobedient when they are penitent.
3. God's  $\text{חסד}$  to David is a special  $\text{חסד}$  for an individual and through him his successors to the nation. In further summary of her view we note the following regarding the term:

The term is not limited to a formal covenant relationship. And since this is the case, it involves more than a legal responsibility. It involves a moral responsibility with the freedom to perform or not to perform acts of  $\text{חסד}$ . (K. D. Sakenfeld, *The Meaning of Hesed in the Hebrew Bible: A New Inquiry* [Montana: Scholars Press 1978] 236-238).

Thus we can account for the term in Exodus 15:13 as an act of God's delivering power. The use in Exodus 20:5b-6 accounts for the meaning outlined in #2 above. Likewise, the meaning of the term in Exodus 34:6-7 comes from #2 above.

Observations drawn from the LXX and English versions reflect the tension involved in determining the precise meaning of חסד as it relates to divine conduct. For example, the LXX uses five different Greek words to capture the breadth of the term resulting in translations such as "mercy," "goodness," or "kindness."<sup>120</sup> Likewise, our English versions use multiple translation values (at least 10 different terms or combination of terms) to capture the breadth of חסד.<sup>121</sup> The shift in translation emphasis is due in part because of the research of Nelson Glueck who brought a change of opinion among scholarship concerning the "traditional" meaning of hesed derived from the LXX.<sup>122</sup>

Glueck proposed the translation of "loyalty," "mutual

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<sup>119</sup> This is the terminology coined by Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible* (Cincinnati: Hebrew Union, 1967). Glueck calls human-to-human חסד "secular" and divine-to-human חסד "theological" or "religious." We refer the reader to the standard works on חסד that provide thorough coverage of its usage. The most recent is G. R. Clark, *The Word Hesed in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOT: Sheffield, 1993) Clark's emphasis is with Lexical Field Studies. See also K. D. Sakenfeld, *Meaning of Hesed*; Boone M. Bowen, 'A Study of CHESD' (PhD dissertation, Yale University) as outlined in G.R. Clark, *The Word Hesed*, 17-18; F. I. Andersen, "Yahweh, The Kind and Sensitive God," in *A God Who is Rich in Mercy: Essays Presented to D.B. Knox*, eds. P. T. O'brien and D. G. Peterson (Australia:Lancer Books, 1986).

<sup>120</sup> eleemosyne, eleemos, dikaiosyne, caris, dikaios.

<sup>121</sup> Words such as love, loving kindness; steadfast love; constant love; unfaithful love; goodness; mercy and loyalty are some of words our English version employ in order to capture the elusive meaning of חסד.

<sup>122</sup> His view was translated in English and popularized by N. Snaith, *The Distinctive Ideas of the Old Testament* (London: Epworth, 1944) 102.

aid" or "reciprocal love" in place of "loving-kindness."<sup>123</sup> Others followed suit but with slight variations on Glueck's meaning. Bowen translated the term as "loyal kindness" or "loving kindness."<sup>124</sup> Sakenfeld translates the term as "faithfulness" yet confesses the flexibility of the term.<sup>125</sup> Hence the translation possibilities for one word, חסד, seem to testify to the elusive nature of the term. And unfortunately, neither etymology nor cognate studies shed further light since the root does not appear in Akkadian, Amorite or Ugaritic.<sup>126</sup> Perhaps D. N. Freedman summarizes it best when he states how חסד, "defies any completely satisfactory translation."<sup>127</sup> How then shall we translate and interpret the term? Before we draw upon a meaning for an interpretation of חסד in Exodus 34:6, we must consider the second word of the phrase חסד נא since we understand it to modify חסד in a hendiadys.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Nelson Glueck, *Hesed in the Bible*, 72,102. His views regarding חסד as divine conduct can be summarized as follows:

1. The term can only be understood as Yahweh's covenantal relationship toward his followers and as such contains concepts such as loyalty, justice and righteousness.
2. God's חסד reflects his strength and power to the faithful and brings aid and salvation.
3. God's חסד should not be identified with grace, even though חסד is based upon it (See page 102 for a detailed survey).

<sup>124</sup> B. M. Bowen, 'A Study of CHESED' in G. R. Clark, *The Word Hesed*, 17-18.

<sup>125</sup> Sakenfeld, *Meaning of Hesed*, 119.

<sup>126</sup> There is a correspondence of the Hebrew to the Aramaic and Arabic but with a very different range in meaning (*ibid.*, 19).

D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate," 12

<sup>128</sup> See the discussion below regarding this feature.



#### 2.1.4.6 נֶמֶן

The word derives its meaning from the root נֶמֶן. The verbal root means "to be firm, sure."<sup>129</sup> As the term נֶמֶן is used throughout scripture, three aspects of this standard definition derived from the root are noticeable.<sup>130</sup> The first aspect is "faithfulness" or that which is "reliable or trustworthy."<sup>131</sup> Permanence is another aspect showing that which does not change, but persists and abides.<sup>132</sup> And finally, "truth."<sup>133</sup> We follow Freedman's definition, "that which has substance and is real, in contrast with the false, which is nothing."<sup>134</sup>

#### 2.1.4.7 The Phrase נֶמֶן וְנֹתָן בֶּן in Exodus 34:6 (*firmly loyal and faithful*)

This compound phrase is typically applied by people to Yahweh.<sup>135</sup> But in Exodus 34:6, Yahweh states this of himself in his self-disclosure to Moses.<sup>136</sup> As part of a hendiadys, the second noun נֶמֶן has the value of an explanatory adjective.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Cf. BDB.

<sup>130</sup> Cf. KBL, BDB.

<sup>131</sup> Ex. 18:21; Neh. 7:2; 1 Kings 2:4; 3:6; Isa. 38:3; etc.

<sup>132</sup> Gen. 24:48; Prov. 11:18; Jer. 2:21; Isa. 39:8; Esther 9:30, etc.

<sup>133</sup> 1 Kings 22:16; 2 Chron. 18:15; Jer. 9:4; Dan. 10:1; Deut. 13:15, etc.

<sup>134</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate," 13

<sup>135</sup> Gen. 24:49; 32:11; 2 Sam. 2:6; 15:20; Psa. 61:8; 115:1; 138:2

<sup>136</sup> The exact hendiadys of Ex. 34:6 with בֶּן preceding it occurs only in Psa 86:15. In that occurrence, the Psalmist makes supplication to Yahweh as he faces danger.

<sup>137</sup> N. Glueck, *Hesed*, 72. Another example of this type of hendiadys

It emphasizes the permanency and certainty of the promised  $\text{חסד}$ . On this point we follow Glueck's suggestion when he states that the appearance of the two terms together emphasizes "the quality of loyalty inherent in the concept of  $\text{חסד}$ ."<sup>138</sup> Thus the possible meaning of "enduring love", "steadfast kindness" or "firmly loyal" would suffice for the entire phrase.<sup>139</sup>

The fact that  $\text{יהוה}$  prefaces the expression and that it refers only to Yahweh, "may indicate that divine  $\text{חסד}$  was recognized as qualitatively (or quantitatively) different from                      occurs in 1 Sam. 20:15 with  $\text{עַד עוֹלָם}$  in Jonathan's request that David would not cut off his  $\text{חסד}$  from Jonathan forever. Clark (*The Word Hesed*, 242) suggests the phrase is in parallelism with a single semantic item in each of its occurrences in Psalm 40:11-12; hence the phrase is itself a simple semantic item. It can also be regarded as hendiadys in Psalm 85:11 (Contra TDOT, " $\text{חֶסֶד}$ "). See also Amos 3:10; Jer. 6:7; Job 2:14; Deut. 7:9; 1 Kings 8:23 for further examples of hendiadys.

Clark's survey of the scholarly research on hendiadys is noteworthy for our interpretation of Ex. 34:6. We summarize it here:

1. In hendiadys, the second noun is a descriptive or explanatory adjective.
2. Hendiadys is an expression an author employs to express the single idea for which an exhaustive, completely descriptive word does not exist.
3. Hendiadys expresses the common idea of two words as a type of superlative, offering the expression in an intensified and impressive manner.
4. Hendiadys, in English literature, is a device deliberately introduced to produce an effect of complexity, dignity, elevation, grandeur and remoteness from ordinary experience (*The Word Hesed*, 242-244).

<sup>138</sup> *Ibid.*, 73

<sup>139</sup> Glueck shows how the relationship created by God's oath in Gen. 15 required the practice of  $\text{חֶסֶד וְאֱמֻנָה}$  and are essential components to the promise. Therefore, it seems a very particular kind of love is meant; that which conforms to loyalty and obligation that fulfills the conditions of the covenant (*Hesed*, 70-75).

that of men...God is more willing than men to do acts of  
דָּוָה."140 We concur with Dentan that Yahweh possesses this  
quality in an exemplary and transcendent degree.141

So in the aftermath of the golden calf incident, Yahweh  
announces the abundance(גַּם) of the דָּוָה וְאֵלֹהִים he is lavishing on  
his stiff-necked, rebellious, faithless people. The use of this  
hendiadys expresses the superlative nature of Yahweh himself  
and of his commitment to Israel. Clark points out how the  
hendiadys of Exodus 34:6 highlights Yahweh's intention to  
commit himself again to the fickle people whom he has chosen.  
And as such the hendiadys evokes a sublime pinnacle, reaching  
beyond ordinary everyday experience.142 "The greatness of his  
דָּוָה consists in his refusal, even in the face of rejection, to  
give up on his people, to set aside the responsibility which he  
took upon himself in choosing them as his people."143 It is an  
enduring quality of God that has no cause outside of God  
himself. Thus these last two qualifying adjectives emphasize  
the attribute of devotion. But all these attributes are not  
merely attitudes or emotions because, as Exodus 34:7 reveals,  
they lead to distinct activities on Yahweh's part. What Yahweh  
does flows from who he is. The actions that characterize him in  
the subsequent verse give content to the magnitude of his

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<sup>140</sup> Sakenfeld, "The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14," *CBQ* 37  
(1975) 324.

<sup>141</sup> R. C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus 34:6f" *VT* 13 (1963)  
34-51.

<sup>142</sup> G. R. Clark, *Hesed in the Hebrew Bible*, 248

<sup>143</sup> Sakenfeld, *Hesed*, 120.

devotion.

#### **2.1.5 Summary of Exodus 34:5-6**

Our lexical analysis of verse 6 has revealed how this litany of attributes is exclusive to Yahweh. In sum they represent Yahweh's affection, patience and devotion.<sup>144</sup> And as such they represent the central features of Yahweh's nature. By reason of their relationship to the context, these attributes unfold the meaning of the name,<sup>145</sup> Yahweh. But the revelation of Yahweh's nature develops further with a list of Yahweh's characteristic activities in verse 7.

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<sup>144</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate," 10.

<sup>145</sup> By "name" we mean character, nature and personality as specified on page 27.

## CHAPTER THREE

### "The Meaning of the Declaration"

#### An Exegetical Analysis of Exodus 34:7

##### 3.1 The Lexical Data

While the string of adjectives is important in verse 6, it is not until we examine the participles characterizing God's continuous actions that the true meaning of those adjectives appears. For in Yahweh's case, his actions speak of his nature and his nature speaks of his actions. In other words, his affection, patience and devotion to Israel manifest themselves in his actions. We shall examine each of these participial phrases separately as we seek to interpret the meaning of Exodus 34:7.

##### 3.1.1 Translation and Grammar of 34:7

נצר חסד לאלפים נשא עון ופשע וחטאה  
ונקה לא ינקה פקד עון אבות על בנים ועל בני בנים על רבעים  
(Guarding covenant-loyalty to thousands [of generations<sup>146</sup>],  
forgiving iniquity, rebellion<sup>147</sup> and sin, but he will

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<sup>146</sup> That this refers to thousands of "generations" and not thousands of people is made clear by two factors:

- 1.The contrasting list consisting of children and grandchildren, great-grandchildren and great-great-grandchildren, denotes generations.
- 2.The paraphrase in Deut. 7:9 has thousand generations.

<sup>147</sup> It is common, however, to translate this word as "transgression." We prefer rebellion in light of the word's forcefulness and the immediate context of the golden calf. See Job 34:37; Psm.25:7.

certainly not declare innocent <sup>148</sup>[the guilty], imposing the guilt of the fathers on the children, and on the grandchildren, and on the third and fourth [generations].)

### 3.1.2 נצר חסד לאלפים (Guarding covenant-loyalty to thousands)

Now for the second time in the declaration the term חסד appears. Once again, a comparison with the declaration in Ex. 20:5-6, a passage preceding the golden calf incident, helps our analysis here.

Ex. 20	Ex. 34
Ptcs. פקד עון	נצר חסד
עשה חסד	נשא עון
	פקד עון

Before the calf crisis Yahweh describes his activity as חסד עשה, "doing חסד."<sup>149</sup> Now after such a breach in covenant by Israel, he declares he is נצר חסד "guarding חסד."<sup>150</sup> The implication is that he deliberately shifts the verb to נצר in

<sup>148</sup> This is the only clause in the whole declaration containing an imperfect verb. All others are participial constructions.

<sup>149</sup> This is, in fact, the typical verb used with חסד regardless of its secular or theological use. The verb in the participle denotes the habitual exercise of the virtue involved, (in our case, חסד). Of special note is the verb שמר that is used with the hendiadys חסד and ברה (Deut.7:9-10; I Ki.8:23; Isa.55:30; 2 Chrn.6:14; Neh.1:5; 9:32; Dan.9:4).

<sup>150</sup> No where else is this verb used of Yahweh in connection with חסד.

Exodus 34:7 with its connotation of "guarding" or "protecting" or "maintaining". The verb נָצַח in conjunction with נָסַח best suits Yahweh's declaration because of the precise nuance it brings to the context. The root describes a persistent behavior as opposed to an occasional, or merely habitual behavior described by the root נָשַׁח. This aspect of נָסַח introduced here implies that Yahweh's commitment to his people is constant and unconditional, Sakenfeld's "persistent faithfulness." Thus Yahweh offers נָסַח even to the undeserving. This carefully crafted phrase undergirds the whole covenant renewal arrangement of Exodus 34. As Dentan summarizes, "It is the result of the uniform direction of His will and purpose"<sup>151</sup> – or, in other words, is of the essence of His nature. From Ex. 34:6-7 on, i.e., all the Biblical parallels, summarize the divine commitment to the relationship with Israel in this manner.<sup>152</sup>

The chart above also reflects that before the golden calf incident, the judgment portion of the declaration appears first on the list in relationship to the "jealous God" concept established by the context of Exodus 20. But after the calf incident, the judgment portion of the declaration appears last on the list in relationship to the expanded merciful God concept established by the context of Exodus 34.

The verse under discussion states how Yahweh's נָסַח

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<sup>151</sup>R. C. Dentan, "The Literary Affinities of Exodus 34:6f," VT, 44.

<sup>152</sup> Thus Numb. 14:18-19; Deut. 7:9-10; 1 Kings 8:23; Neh. 1:5; 9:27f; Dan. 9:4; Jer. 32:18; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18-20.

extends to "thousands of generations" and omits the qualifying phrase provided in the Decalogue, *לאלפים לאהבי ולשמתי* (*to those who love me and keep my commandments.*") Once again, a comparison with Exodus 20 helps our analysis. In the initial covenant context of Exodus 20:5-6, "lovers of God" are described as obedient and loyal according to covenant stipulations and as such are eligible for *חסד*.<sup>153</sup> Likewise, Exodus 34:7 omits the qualifying phrase provided in the Decalogue, *עון פקר לשנאי* (*"Those who hate me."*) In Ex. 20:5-6, haters of God are described as disobedient and disloyal according to covenant stipulations and as such are punished.

Why might these qualifying phrases (i.e., lovers or haters) be omitted in Exodus 34:6-7? To propose a possible answer, we must first investigate the possible meaning of their appearance in Exodus 20:5-6. When these qualifying phrases are used in Exodus 20:5-6, Israel is a newly created nation. The verdict was still out relative to Israel's covenant allegiance. The new nation had yet to prove if it was made of "lovers" or "haters" of God. However, in the golden calf incident, Israel's actions spoke louder than her words which had

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<sup>153</sup>The book of Deuteronomy helps us to define these terms with more precision. According to W. Moran "thou shall love God" in Deut. 6:5 presupposes "those who love God" in Ex. 20:6. He states how this love relationship is to be defined as covenant love. Moran argues 1. This love can be commanded. 2. This love is related to fear/reverence. 3. This love is expressed in loyalty in service and in unqualified obedience to the demands of the law. 4. The existence of this kind of covenant love is evidenced in extra-Biblical sources and is analogous to the love of God in Deut. (W. L. Moran, "The Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 25 1963) 77-87.



proclaimed, "All that the Lord has spoken we shall do."<sup>154</sup>

Israel had poignantly demonstrated, through breaking the covenant, to be on the side of those who hate him, those who do not keep his commandments. This may account for the omission of these qualifying phrases.<sup>155</sup>

However, this omission is of fundamental importance for understanding Yahweh's reaction to Israel's sin. It means that Yahweh's mercy towards Israel is independent of their right response to him. There is no goodness in them, no partial faithfulness, on the basis of which they can lay a claim before God. This reveals the genuine character of the divine mercy. For "Even when Israel is disobedient it is still the recipient of the divine goodness. The comparison with Exodus 20:5ff shows pointedly how profound a statement of God's grace is contained in 34:6-7."<sup>156</sup> The omission of these "conditional elements" together with the double emphasis on  $\text{לֵב}$  stresses Yahweh's unconditional affection and devotion to Israel.<sup>157</sup> The chart below summarizes the parallels between Exodus 20 and 34.

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<sup>154</sup>Ex. 24:3.

<sup>155</sup> This understanding finds support in Deut. 7:9-10. Moses is before the second generation of Israelites and is renewing the covenant. These qualifying phrases which were last used in Ex. 20 with the new nation are repeated once again in Ex.34. Because, like the first generation, the second generation had yet to prove if they were lovers or haters of God.

<sup>156</sup> Moberly, *Mountain of God*, 88.

<sup>157</sup> T. E. Fretheim, 302.

Summary of the Parallels between Exodus 20:5-6 and  
Exodus 34:6-7

Before Calf/Ex.20

After Calf/Ex.34

Adjs.      קנא

רחום

חנון

ארץ אפים

רב חסד ואמת

Ptcs.    פקד עון  
          עשה חסד

נצר חסד

נשא עון

פקד עון

Ptcs\*<sup>158</sup>    לאהבי  
              לשנאי

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<sup>158</sup>These participles refer to man and not to God as in the above participles.

Thus from this first participial phrase, the reader begins to apprehend Yahweh's statement that he is **גִּבֹר חֶסֶד וְאֱמֶת**. But in the second participial phrase below, the reader fully apprehends Yahweh's persistent and enduring commitment to Israel. Not only is Yahweh "guarding **חֶסֶד**" but he is also bearing and forgiving sin.

### 3.1.3 נָשָׂא עוֹן וּפְשָׁע וְחַטָּאת וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנָּקֶה

*(Forgiving iniquity, rebellion and sin but he will certainly not declare innocent [the guilty])*

The verb **נָשָׂא** literally means "to raise or lift", "bear, carry."<sup>159</sup> In an idiomatic sense the verb can mean to forgive.<sup>160</sup> But this idiomatic meaning of the verb is not frequent in the Old Testament. As the verb relates to Yahweh, D. N. Freedman has observed three general uses. 1. "bearing the burden of the people (sustaining, guiding, bearing with)," 2. "being gracious to his people (from the idiom 'to lift up the face')," and 3. "forgiveness" of the people (especially obvious in idiomatic use when the object of the verb is **עוֹן**).<sup>161</sup> All of these nuances are probably in view relative to Exodus 34:7 in the following manner: Yahweh could be seen as bearing the injury that Israel inflicted upon him with the golden calf

<sup>159</sup> Cf. *BDB*.

<sup>160</sup> See Gen. 19:21; Numb. 14:19; Isa. 53:4, 12; Ex. 10:17; 23:21, 32:32; Josh. 24:19.

<sup>161</sup> As quoted by K. D. Sakenfeld in "The Problem of Divine Forgiveness in Numbers 14," *CBQ*, 325. Sakenfeld quotes Freedman's material from an unpublished paper before the Biblical Colloquium.

incident. By accepting the injury, without desire for revenge, Yahweh carries away or removes Israel's guilt.<sup>162</sup> By his decision to accompany Israel once again (פָּנִי יֵלֶכְנִי, *my face will go*, 33:14) he is "being gracious to his people." And by initiating covenant renewal (34:1,10) Yahweh is extending forgiveness. Yahweh's forgiveness is not relegated to a verbal transaction but is to be "understood as submission in suffering" and then "the extraordinary significance of God's willingness to forgive becomes clear."<sup>163</sup>

Yahweh's forgiveness directly flows from the fact that he is "guarding רָחֵם." As such רָחֵם in Exodus 34:6 encompasses forgiveness. Thus Yahweh's רָחֵם reaches far beyond his covenant obligation or duty. For it was his duty to carry out the sanctions of the covenant as we noted earlier. As such רָחֵם in Exodus 34:6 encompasses grace, generosity, devotion and love.<sup>164</sup> So רָחֵם includes grace, mercy, forgiveness, faithfulness, love and loyalty but far exceeds even the meanings of these terms. And in light of Israel's blatant rebellion, his action of רָחֵם is inexplicable, unaccountable, extravagant and incomprehensible; this is why it is so great.<sup>165</sup> But forgiveness in this context has additional

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<sup>162</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate," 15

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid.*, 16. The suffering servant of Isaiah 53: 4,12 grips the reader with this reality. See also Leviticus 16 and Hosea 11:8-9 for further representations of divine suffering.

<sup>164</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate," 13.

<sup>165</sup> We make mention of the fact that the typical word for love אָהַב does not occur in the passage even though it occurs in the Ten Commandments (Ex.20:6 as man's duty to God). According to D. N. Freedman the word was

content.

Yahweh declares that he "forgives iniquity, rebellion and sin." The mention of these three prominent terms for sin, clustered together, may serve as a comprehensive list much like the list of terms describing Yahweh's nature in verse 6.<sup>166</sup> A rigid separation should not be made relative to the meaning of each of these terms.<sup>167</sup> They seem to be all inclusive in describing Israel's nature before God. Israel's nature stands in stark contrast to Yahweh's. The point is that Yahweh forgives every aspect of Israel's intentional, conscious wayward activity towards him.<sup>168</sup> That he is forgiving, regardless of unpenitent people underlines his "great רחם" character and Moses' important role as mediator.<sup>169</sup>

Furthermore, that he is forgiving towards Israel in spite of

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used too loosely; since it could describe both profound and trivial affection and devotion. Thus the biblical writers chose רחם to bring out the quality and degree of God's love more clearly ("God Compassionate," 13).

<sup>166</sup> The list "compassion, grace and patience" seem to be comprehensive terms to describe God's love.

<sup>167</sup> Moses uses only two of the terms in 34:9.

<sup>168</sup> Israel's waywardness is underscored by the repetition of עם קשה ערף, "stiff-necked people" in 32:9; 33:3,5; 34:9.

<sup>169</sup> We do not interpret as repentance the action of the people in 33:5 but as remorse for God's tidings regarding the journey. This interpretation is based on Numb. 14:29 and a parallel use of the verb "to mourn" when Israel continues to be rebellious. Additionally, Moses does not appeal to any repenting act of Israel's when he intercedes in 32-34. Yahweh grants Moses' request on the basis of Moses' right standing before God and Yahweh's grace. Through Moses' mediatorship reconciliation between Yahweh and Israel is accomplished. See also Gen. 35:4 and Ez. 26:16 as further evidence.

the prior declaration that "he will not forgive (שׁוּן) your rebellion"<sup>170</sup> not only underlines his "great גָּדוֹל" character but also introduces a new element into the divine-human relationship with Israel.<sup>171</sup> In this declaration, divine forgiveness becomes foundational for the following reason: Without forgiveness, Yahweh would consume Israel as promised in 33:3. It is obvious from the context that Moses fears that God will disinherit them as his people. And for this reason his intercessions continually try to steer Yahweh away from the idea.<sup>172</sup> On four occasions Moses declares that the people are "his (Yahweh's) people."<sup>173</sup> So when God declares himself to be a forgiving deity, the true content of that forgiveness means "the non-destruction of the people, in the very continuation of his relationship to the community as his community, in the decision not to create a new nation of Moses...and not to disinherit the presently constituted community of God."<sup>174</sup> This forgiveness in turn secures God's continued presence with Israel.<sup>175</sup> Divine forgiveness then has a three-fold

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<sup>170</sup> Ex. 23:21. See our discussion above regarding the "angel" or "messenger" as one and the same as Yahweh.

<sup>171</sup> We owe this suggestion to Terence Fretheim. In comparing Moses' role to that of Noah in Genesis 6-8, he highlights how, unlike the Gen. 6-8 account, divine forgiveness is now for the first time a fundamental way of relating to sin (305).

<sup>172</sup> Ex. 33:13,15-16; 34:9.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>174</sup> Sakenfeld, *CBQ* 326.

<sup>175</sup> Adding further fortification to the above discussion is the progression of Moses' prayer in the unit of chs.32-34. It should be noted that God's response to Moses' first intercession (32:14) does not

foundational function in this declaration: 1. It secures the community. 2. It secures Yahweh's presence. 3. It secures a new way of relating to sin.

But Divine forgiveness is also Yahweh's initiative. In other words, it depends entirely upon Yahweh himself as to who will be the recipient of his grace, i.e., "I will be gracious to whom I will be gracious, and show mercy on whom I will show mercy."<sup>176</sup> Thus God initiates restoration with fallen Israel through covenant renewal (34:10). God makes this gracious step toward Israel because it is the divine nature to do so.<sup>177</sup> God's response and initiative to the golden calf incident becomes both determinative and paradigmatic for Israel's future history as God's people. On account of this restoration and this gracious act of God at Sinai which was decisively revealed in Moses' personal theophany and the new covenant, the pericope forms the positive counterpoint to Israel's rebellious acts throughout her history.<sup>178</sup> As G.W. Coats has pointed out, "The

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result in an extension of divine forgiveness; only a reversal of impending judgment (□□). Likewise, God's response to Moses' second intercession (32:33) results in anything but forgiveness (perhaps due to 23:21). But by Moses' third intercession (33:15ff) Yahweh declares his forgiving character relative to sin. Thus in Moses' final intercession (34:9), he asks for forgiveness based on this revelation and so secures Yahweh's forgiveness as evidenced by vs.10.

<sup>176</sup> Ex. 33:19

<sup>177</sup> T. Fretheim, Interpretation

<sup>178</sup> S. J. Hafemann's emphasis for the *rebellion* in the wilderness as the negative counterpoint to God's gracious acts of election and deliverance is the impetus for the emphasis above. (*Paul, Moses, and the History of Israel* [Peabody: Hendrickson, 1995] 230; see also E.P. Sanders, *Paul and Palestinian Judaism, A Comparison of Patterns of Religion* [Philadelphia:

events of rebellion and Yahweh's aid and patience are now ordered in a temporal sequence. Yahweh gives his aid *in spite* of Israel's rebellion, and Israel continues to rebel *in spite* of the aid."<sup>179</sup>

In the same breath that Yahweh declares that he forgives iniquity, rebellion and sin, he firmly and emphatically asserts,<sup>180</sup> וְנִקָּה לֹא יִנְקָה (*but he will certainly not declare the guilty innocent.*) The verb occurs frequently in the Old Testament. In the Piel formation it means "to make clean or exempt."<sup>181</sup> It is often translated as, "he will not leave the guilty unpunished." How then are we to understand the declaration of forgiveness in light of promised punishment? On the one hand, Yahweh forgives, yet on the other, he also punishes. These two "seemingly contrary" activities are part and parcel of Yahweh's nature and should not be understood in isolation from each other. God's justice requires that there be payment of the penalty for sin. God's love, however desires reconciliation and restoration to fellowship with him.

On this apparent tension within the deity, Sakenfeld notes that in the framework of כִּסְיוֹ based forgiveness there is still room for punishment for carrying forward God's justice in

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Fortress Press, 1977] 36-39).

<sup>179</sup> G. W. Coats, "The King's Loyal Opposition: Obedience and Authority in Exodus 32-34," in *Canon and Authority, Essays in Old Testament Religion and Theology*, eds G. W. Coats and B. O. Long, 1977, 253.

<sup>180</sup> The infinitive absolute placed before the verbal form strengthens the statement and emphasizes the verbal idea.

<sup>181</sup>Cf. BDB.



response to the unfaithful community. Forgiveness "need not be precluded or even cheapened by punishment of the community while the relationship is being continued."<sup>182</sup> To be sure, in the context of Exodus 34 the "possibility of disobedience and punishment is built into the narrative with the demand for exclusive worship of Yahweh (34:14)."<sup>183</sup> Yahweh's forgiveness then does not necessitate a cancellation of punishment.

We might argue further that Israel was not predisposed to think of these attributes (mercy and judgment) as a contradiction in the character of their deity. Yes, Yahweh's justice and mercy would, on occasion, be questioned but that these were divine attributes was not disputed.<sup>184</sup>

#### פקד עון אבות על בנים ועל בני בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים 3.1.4

*(Imposing the guilt<sup>185</sup> of the fathers on the children, and on the grandchildren, and on the third and fourth<sup>186</sup> [generations<sup>187</sup>].)*

<sup>182</sup> Sakenfeld, *CBQ* 326.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid.*, 327.

<sup>184</sup> Numb. 14:18; Nahum 1:3; Jer. 30:11, 46:28; Hab. 3:1, etc.

<sup>185</sup> This phrase completely contrasts וְשָׂא עֹן, *forgiving iniquity* as we have noted above.

<sup>186</sup> The verse displays surprising numerical parallelism. Typically, numerical parallelism in the Bible is expressed by the following set pattern, "x" // "x + 1" as in Amos 1:3, "for three transgressions of Damascus, and for four I will not restore it" (Stanley Gevirtz, *Patterns in the Early Poetry of Israel* [Chicago: Chicago Press, 1963] 18-19.) For other examples of numerical parallelism with one and two see Psm.62:12; Job 33:14. For parallelism with six and seven see Job 5:19; Prov.6:16, etc.

<sup>187</sup> The enumeration implies generations are in view and not numerous

This third and final participial phrase of the declaration highlights the process of the punishment promised in the preceding clause. There is a wide range of meaning attached to the verb פקד throughout the Old Testament. Such definitions as "to miss, number, visit, and count" are among the possibilities.<sup>188</sup> When the verb is immediately followed by עון as in Exodus 34:7, the connotation is an imposition of punishment from Yahweh upon either a guilty individual or group.<sup>189</sup> The verbal root used in conjunction with נקם before it underlines Yahweh's justice. The object of punishment is to satisfy the claim of justice against the guilty; the object of forgiveness, in the preceding phrase, is to achieve reconciliation with the sinner. In the process of attaining it, recourse might be taken to various forms of discipline and temporary punishments, as well as forgiveness.<sup>190</sup>

Thus Yahweh warns, through the means of a conventional<sup>191</sup> Semitic phrase, of the totality of the punishment,

אבות על בנים ועל בני בנים על שלשים ועל רבעים

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people. The idea is four generations.

<sup>188</sup>Cf. BDB.

<sup>189</sup> See also Ex. 13:19; 20:5; 32:34; Numb. 14:18; Deut. 5:9, Psa. 89:33; Lam. 4:22; Hos. 8:13, 9:9; Lev. 26:39-40; Isa. 14:21. But the connotation is not always a negative visitation. For other examples where blessing is in view and not punishment see Gen. 21:1; 1 Sam. 2:21.

<sup>190</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate," 24.

<sup>191</sup> The phrase denotes continuity (four generations) as evidenced by its use elsewhere in Gen. 50:23; 2 Ki. 10:30; Job 42:16. Continuity is also expressed by two generations see: Lev. 26:39-40; Isa. 14:21; Neh. 9:2.

(on the children, and on the grandchildren, and on the third and fourth [generations].) The phrase requires some explanation since it seems to violate the principle of Yahweh's justice outlined above. We must note that Yahweh's declaration does not mean he is punishing people who have not sinned. The recipients of his punishment are the successive generations that "keep hating" Yahweh. For the reasons noted earlier, the important qualifying phrase, 'אֲנִי (the ones who hate me) found in Ex.20 is omitted here, but helps us define the ones God punishes.

Two overlapping concepts issue from this phrase. The phrase expresses the totality of the punishment within the framework of the ancient idea of corporate solidarity. Under this mind set individual members of the nation were part of a common personality. The group could be regarded as an individual. The group's personality came from the leader and in this manner they were "extensions of his personality."<sup>192</sup> Freedman states, "the power of his personality, did not extend beyond his lifetime. This would include at most the members of the third and fourth generations (by our reckoning, great-grand-children and great-great-grand-children)."<sup>193</sup> On this premise, a guilty Israelite leader and his entire family, as an extension of his personality, must be destroyed.<sup>194</sup> In this

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<sup>192</sup> D. N. Freedman, "God Compassionate, 15.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>194</sup> See Josh. 7; 2 Sam. 12:14-23; On this same premise of corporate solidarity we witness individuals confessing sin and seeking repentance on behalf of generations past: Neh. 9:2, Dan. 9:16.

manner total punishment to that individual is rendered.<sup>195</sup>

According to this idea, the innocent were not perceived as undergoing unjust treatment.

It follows that since the punishment is total and complete it is enduring and involves successive generations as the phrase expresses. Yahweh warns of the longevity of divine punishment for sin.<sup>196</sup> But note the contrast of this longevity to the longevity of divine reward for righteousness, "*guarding covenant loyalty to thousands*" expressed immediately before it. With this final phrase, the declaration comes to a close and the name of Yahweh has unfolded before Moses.

### 3.1.5 Summary from Exodus 34:7

Our lexical analysis of verse 7 has revealed how, like the attributes of verse 6, this string of characteristic activities are exclusive to Yahweh. In sum the participial phrases further display Yahweh's great  $\text{לִי$  in that he forgives sin and must, accordingly, punish sin.<sup>197</sup> As such they

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<sup>195</sup> We note further how parents affect the child and likewise one generation affects the next generation.

<sup>196</sup> But the phrase is used for the opposite idea also where the subsequent generations receive divine reward for righteousness. See Gen. 50:23; 2 Kings 10:30; Job 42:16. See also the Aramaic, Egyptian and Assyrian inscriptions in *ANET*, 561, 661.

<sup>197</sup> From our observations of the adjectives Yahweh uses for himself (pp. 47) we determined Yahweh's deep devotion for his people. Based on this devotion he guards covenant-loyalty, forgives sin and punishes sin, i.e., the subsequent participial phrases. It appears that both the adjectives and participial phrases radiate from the concept of Yahweh's  $\text{לִי}$  which is being lauded in the entire declaration.

represent the central features of Yahweh's activities. Thus the exegesis of Yahweh's own nature reaches its conclusion.

## **CONCLUSIONS**

Our investigation of the context and data of Exodus 34:6-7 has led to several conclusions which may be summarized as follows:

1. The fundamental theological problem in Exodus 32-34 is the impossibility of God's presence abiding in the midst of a sinful people. How can God's holy presence continue in sinful Israel's midst without destroying the nation?
2. The declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 is the solution to Israel's theological problem. In the context of Israel's sin as the problem to be dealt with, Yahweh's character is revealed entirely in moral terms, showing how he deals with sin and the need for forgiveness in the life of Israel.
3. The declaration of Exodus 34:6-7 reveals the uniqueness of Israel's deity on three levels. First, Israel's deity is unique by virtue of his very name, Yahweh. By his name, he promises his presence and action on behalf of his needy people. Second, Israel's deity is unique by virtue of his characteristic attributes of affection, patience and devotion. By these attributes his sentiment towards Israel is displayed.

And finally, Israel's deity is unique by virtue of his characteristic activities of guarding  $\text{לִשְׁמֹר}$  and forgiving sin. By these activities his commitment towards Israel is displayed. Thus the name, the attributes and activities are exclusive to Israel's deity making this particular divine self-disclosure supreme.

4. As a result of divine initiative and divine grace, Israel secures divine forgiveness. The tension in the relationship between Yahweh and Israel is finally alleviated. This initiative and response from Yahweh to Israel appear to function as a paradigm in the covenantal relationship between Yahweh and his people.

5. Our pericope can be seen as a linch-pin in the theological progression of the Old Testament. The centrality and cohesiveness of the declaration for Israel's religious thought becomes apparent on account of its enduring nature. While the litany of divine characteristics in Exodus 34:6-7 never fully repeats itself, one always finds at least two or more of these characteristics proclaimed by members of the covenant community.<sup>198</sup> His covenant people from Moses to the later prophets have *prayed* for him to do  $\text{לִשְׁמֹר}$ , *proclaimed* that he does  $\text{לִשְׁמֹר}$ , and *praised* him for doing  $\text{לִשְׁמֹר}$ . On account of the Exodus 34:6-7 revelation, Israel was alert to the fact and understood that God's protection over them radiated from his  $\text{לִשְׁמֹר}$ .

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<sup>198</sup> Numb. 14:18-19; Deut. 7:9-10; 1 Kings 8:23; Neh. 1:5, 9:27ff; Dan. 9:19; Jer. 32:18; Nahum 1:3; Joel 2:13; Jon. 4:2; Mic. 7:18-19; Psalms 86:15; 103:8,11,17; 145:8

All Israel knew its God and experienced him to be "a God compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love."

The character of the divine presence as revealed to Moses may have initially been a "private theophany" but the character of the divine presence soon became public. It is Yahweh's declaration of himself to Moses in Exodus 34:6-7 that reverberated throughout Israel's generations:

הודו ליהוה כי טוב כי לעולם חסדו

"Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his firm  
loyalty endures forever!"

Psalm 136:1

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